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# Unlocking Piranesi's Imaginary Prisons

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# UNLOCKING PIRANESI'S IMAGINARY PRISONS

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## DEDICATION

To Giuliano, Carmela, and Vittoria.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to elucidate points that remain problematic in the scholarship of the imaginary prisons and to position *Carceri d'Invenzione* embedded in Piranesi's evolving line of works. My focus was on Piranesi's intellectual aspirations for the illustrations and the way in which they reflect Piranesi's theoretical and philosophical inclinations. I was interested in finding a proper correlation between the illustrations of imaginary prisons and the artist's intellectual development with the objective to provide the work with a coherent view in tandem with Piranesi's *modus operandi*. I associated the imagery of the imaginary prisons and Piranesi's references to specific places and historical and contemporary events in the illustrations to specific eighteenth-century debates encompassing taste, law, and the Greco-Roman controversy.

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The *Carceri d'Invenzione* is probably the most famous and certainly the most enigmatic work that Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720 – 1778) ever produced. This polemical book is composed of a series of sixteen etchings depicting gigantic interior spaces of imaginary prisons. It is the result of Piranesi's reworking of the fourteen etchings of the previous *Invenzioni capric. di Carceri*, first published in 1749-50, with the addition of two plates.

Within the more than 1,000 plates that compose Piranesi's oeuvre, why are these sixteen so special? Why did Piranesi create and, after more than a decade, re-create these illustrations? What is behind these invented scenarios? Indeed, even after 250 years passed their first publication, the answers for these questions have been lacking.

This thesis aims to elucidate points that remain problematic in the scholarship of the imaginary prisons. I consider the traditional interpretation of the *Carceri* bounded and, sometimes, even unconvincing. Recent scholarship on Piranesi seldom addresses the illustrations of imaginary prisons. The references to the *Carceri* usually consist of examples to prove tangential points about other publications. Nevertheless, in regard to other works of Piranesi, recent studies dramatically shifted the focus from the artist's personality or from strictly formalist approaches towards multidisciplinary avenues of inquiry that encompass art, architecture, archaeology, and philosophy, among other fields. I embarked in the endeavor of interpreting the *Carceri* in a similar vein.



As soon as I started researching about the *Carceri*, I noticed how disparate was the discourse that accounted for it in relation to the rest of Piranesi's oeuvre. Qualities highlighted in works such as *Campus Martius* and *Antichità Romane*, such as analytical skills and a solid archaeological and architectural foundation, gave place to an almost irrational approach in the "immediacy" of the Imaginary Prisons.<sup>1</sup> The Romantic view of the *Carceri* as an explosion of creativity would make sense if the work was composed by only one or two etchings, not a set of fourteen plates that, more than ten years later, became sixteen revised and reorganized illustrations. If the production of the *Carceri* had been driven by a cathartic urge of creative expression, detached from deeper intellectual aspirations, Piranesi would never have returned to them for revision. If drugs or fever had compelled Piranesi to conceive the prisons, I assume that he would keep the illustrations to himself. I could not see any reason for an ambitious eighteenth-century artist, architect, antiquarian, publisher, and archaeologist, like Piranesi was, to publish and republish a set of hallucinatory "sketches."

In contrast to the Romantics, that sought facts in Piranesi's biography to justify the artist's "disturbed psyche" expressed in the *Carceri*, I focused on his erudition as a key to decipher the illustrations. I concentrated my research on Piranesi's intellectual activity and on his relationship with colleagues, friends, and enemies both in his hometown Venice and in his adopted city Rome. The objective was to identify the debates of which he took part and his opinions and convictions. A vital source in tandem with my approach was Heather Hyde Minor's *Piranesi's Lost Words*, in that the book

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Campvs Martivs antiqvae vrbis (Romae, 1762)*; Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Antichità Romane de' Tempi Della Repubblica, e de' Primi Imperatori*. (Rome, 1748).

explored Piranesi's intellectuality as an author.<sup>2</sup> This avenue of inquiry also demanded the investigation of the historical context, from which important keys were revealed. I highlight his involvement with the *Accademia degli Arcadi* and the broad debate about taste of the eighteenth century.

During my research, I came across Piranesi's bold, reactive and provocative intellectual interaction with his peers in a list of publications that I named "response-publications." I claim that the imaginary prisons are the first within this "genre." As a result, my thesis positions the *Carceri d'Invenzione* as embedded in Piranesi's evolving line of works.<sup>3</sup> Considering the publications in which Piranesi explicitly demonstrated his theoretical and philosophical views, I sought to identify Piranesi's intellectual aspirations for the etchings depicting imaginary prisons. I was interested in finding a proper correlation between the images and Piranesi's artistic, intellectual, and philosophical development with the objective to provide the *Carceri d'Invenzione* with a coherent view in tandem with the artist's *modus operandi*.

## 1.1 THE COLLECTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

The University of South Carolina has the privilege of being one of a few institutions in the world to hold among its collections of rare books a complete set of the *Opere* by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778). The *Opere* is a posthumous edition that encompasses twenty-nine elephant-folio volumes with all of Piranesi's publications.

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<sup>2</sup> Heather Hyde Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> The Romantics first stressed Piranesi's biographical features to justify the *Carceri*. The Modernists, in contrast, focused on the formalist aspects of the *Carceri*, associating its spaces with Cubism and Surrealism. Also, Piranesi's *Carceri* are frequently mentioned in analogy with the oeuvre of M. C. Escher (1898 – 1972).

The issue in our library was published between 1837-9 by the Parisian company Firmin-Didot.<sup>4</sup>

Volume eight of *Opere Varie* comprehends the c. 1750 *Opere Varie di Architettura, Prospettiva, Grotteschi, Antichità*, plus *Carceri d'Invenzione* of 1761, *Alcune Vedute di Archi Trionfali* of 1765, and *Trofei di Ottaviano Augusto* of 1753.<sup>5</sup>

To develop my thesis, I greatly benefited from the physical availability of the twenty-nine volumes for firsthand inspection in the Ernest F. Hollings Library.<sup>6</sup> I also took advantage of the digital copies of this collection in ultra-high resolution. A project of digitalization of the entire collection through an ASPIRE II grant resulted in images of astonishing quality, which allowed me to distinguish relevant details that even a magnifying lens would not.

## 1.2 HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

The previous scholarship on the *Carceri* presents considerable gaps and did not follow the evolution of Piranesian studies. Piranesi's historiography first focused on his biography, followed by his technical and formalist virtuosity, then on his architectural postulations, and, finally, on his intellectual, ideological, and philosophical contributions.

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<sup>4</sup> Firmin-Didot bought the copperplates and the publishing rights from Giovanni Battista's heirs and continued to print issues until the 1830s. In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI acquired the entire collection of plates and took it back to Rome, where it still is located as part of the Papal Staes. The copperplates are currently in the Calcografia dell'Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica, "arranged in the same order in which they were received from Firmin-Didot." See Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Luigi Ficacci, and Petra Lamers-Schütze, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: the etchings*, Icons (Köln: Taschen, 2006), 39.

<sup>5</sup> The *Opere Varie di Architettura, Prospettiva, Grotteschi, Antichità*; inventate, ed incise da Giambattista Piranesi Architetto Veneziano is a reprint of Piranesi's first book *Prima Parte di Architettura e Prospettive* (1743), except for one plate, with additions. *Carceri d'Invenzione* is a reworking of *Invenzione capric. di Carceri* (1749-50) with two additional plates. *Alcune Vedute di Archi Trionfali* is a reprint of *Antichità Romane de' Tempi della Repubblica e de' Primi Imperatori* of 1748.

<sup>6</sup> The publication belongs to the Irvin Department of Rare Books & Special Collections under the curatorship of Dr. Jeanne Britton.

However, the *Carceri* is considered a marginal piece within Piranesi's oeuvre, disconnected from the logic that drove other works.

Piranesi's biographies formed the first corpus of Piranesian studies which began in the eighteenth-century.<sup>7</sup> It was on these biographies that the Romantic movement created an avenue of inquiry completely detached from the rest of the oeuvre of Piranesi in the nineteenth-century. Together with the development of the concept of the Sublime, the Romantics interpreted the distinct nature of the *Carceri* as the result of neurosis, fever or drug-induced hallucinations, neglecting the intellectual, methodical, and analytical approach that Piranesi demonstrated in the rest of his oeuvre.<sup>8</sup>

The *Carceri* was hugely influential for the Romantic movement. Many scholars even categorize Piranesi as a forerunner of Romanticism. A dominant Romantic interpretation for the *Carceri* read the illustrations as an expression of the artist's internal

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<sup>7</sup> Robin Middleton listed the many biographies of Piranesi that popped up in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, and briefly exposed their biases, including Giovanni Ludovico Bianconi, "Elogio Storico Del Cavaliere Giambattista Piranesi Celebre Antiquario Ed Incisore Di Roma," *Antologia Romana* 5, no. 34 (1779): 265–67; no. 35 (1779): 273–75; no. 36 (1779): 281–84; J. G. Legrand, "Notice Sur La Vie et Les Ouvrages de J. B. Piranesi ... Rédigée Sur Les Notes et Les Pièces Communiquées Par Ses Fils, Les Compagnons et Les Continuateurs de Ses Nombreux Travaux," 1799, nouv. acq. fr. 5968, Paris, Bib. Nat. MSS (printed inaccurately in G. Morazzoni, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: notizie biografiche*, Milan, n.d. [1921]; reprinted in *Nouvelles de l'estampe*, no. 5, 1969, pp. 191ff.); Pietro Biagi, *Sull'incisione e Sul Piranesi* (Venice, 1820). See Middleton, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> The standard work of reference to the Sublime is Edmund Burke and R. and J. Dodsley, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. (London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-mall, 1757).

conflicts, liberating his unconscious in an explosion of furious creativity.<sup>9</sup> This interpretation is as fascinatingly appealing as a good fiction novel. It became very popular after a citation of the imaginary prisons in Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*.<sup>10</sup> The *Carceri* deeply impacted authors such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Victor Hugo (1802-1885), and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), just to name a few. In turn, albeit instilled with their perspective, they promoted Piranesi's reputation as a great artist. The Romantic perspective was so influential that survived up to the twentieth century. In 1949, Aldous Huxley still largely relied on Piranesi's biographical approach of the *Carceri* in the "splendid literary exercise" that characterized

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<sup>9</sup> In 2015, David R. Marshall offered a brief list of the authors of this perspective, but he still proposed an interpretation of Piranesi as an "artist devoted to the production of paradoxically irrational spatial constructions" in the *Carceri*, like an "eighteenth-century M. C. Escher." See David R. Marshall, "Piranesi's Creative Imagination: The Capriccio and the Carceri," in *The Piranesi Effect*, ed. Kerrianne Stone and Gerard Vaughan (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2015), 118–20. Kenneth Clark attributed to Bianconi the construction that the illustrations of the *Carceri* were the "result of a feverish dream." But he could not free himself from this perspective, asserting that Piranesi was a "strange and solitary figure." Clark added that he could not "help wondering if this solitary dreamer did not intensify his dreams by the use of opium." See Kenneth Clark, *The Romantic Rebellion: Romantic versus Classic Art* (London: Murray, 1976), 56; For Bianconi's biography, see Giovanni Ludovico Bianconi, "Elogio Storico Del Cavaliere Giambattista Piranesi Celebre Antiquario Ed Incisore Di Roma," *Antologia Romana* 5, no. 34 (1779): 265–67; no. 35 (1779): 273–75; no. 36 (1779): 281–84; Marguerite Yourcenar mentioned a supposed malaria that inflicted Piranesi in 1742, his "crisis of agoraphobia and claustrophobia combined," and "the anguish of captive space from which the *Prisons* certainly resulted." See Marguerite Yourcenar, *The Dark Brain of Piranesi and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), 104–5.

<sup>10</sup> The passage is here reproduced: "Many years ago, when I was looking over Piranesi's, *Antiquities of Rome*, Mr. Coleridge, who was standing by, described to me a set of plates by that artist, called his *Dreams*, and which record the scenery of his own visions during the delirium of a fever. Some of them (I describe only from memory of Mr. Coleridge's account) represented vast Gothic halls, on the floor of which stood all sorts of engines and machinery, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults, &c. &c., expressive of enormous power put forth and resistance overcome. Creeping along the sides of the walls you perceived a staircase; and upon it, groping his way upwards, was Piranesi himself: follow the stairs a little further and you perceive it come to a sudden and abrupt termination without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who had reached the extremity except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, you suppose at least that his labours must in some way terminate here. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher, on which again Piranesi is perceived, but this time standing on the very brink of the abyss. Again elevate your eye, and a still more aerial flight of stairs is beheld, and again is poor Piranesi busy on his aspiring labours; and so on, until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall." Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, and Kindred Papers*. (New York: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1876).

his book *Prisons*.<sup>11</sup>

In the twentieth century, scholars began to discover Piranesi as an artist and heavily used the methodology of Formalism and Connoisseurship to interpret his oeuvre. Due to the distinct formal aspects of the *Carceri*, this approach kept the imaginary prisons apart from Piranesi's body of works. Nonetheless, scholars such as Henri Focillon presented an invaluable work of dating, classifying, and cataloguing Piranesi's etchings.<sup>12</sup> With this approach, the different editions and states of the *Carceri* began to receive the necessary temporal perspective.

The identification and examination of the theories and debates that Piranesi conveyed in the *Carceri* started relatively recently. The most important body of research on the impact of Piranesi's erudition, including in the *Carceri*, started only in the second half of the twentieth century. Scholars such as Ulya Vogt-Göknil and Patricia May Sekler produced the first analyses concerning architectural postulations in the *Carceri*.<sup>13</sup> Maurizio Calvesi, whose work was an important source for my thesis, was a pioneer scholar that identified many theoretical and philosophical arguments that Piranesi addressed in the *Carceri*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Aldous Huxley and Jean Adhémar, *Prisons [with the Carceri Etchings by G. B. Piranesi, with a Critical Study by Jean Adhemar]* (London: Trianon Press, 1949); The expression "splendid literary exercise" is a quote of Jonathan Scott in Ian Jonathan Scott, *Piranesi* (London: New York: Academy Editions; St. Martin's Press, 1975), 397 fn 14.

<sup>12</sup> Henri Focillon, *Giovanni-Battista Piranesi, 1720-1778* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1918); Arthur Mayger Hind, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi; a Critical Study, with a List of His Published Works and Detailed Catalogues of the Prisons and the Views of Rome* (London: The Cotswold Gallery, 1922); Arthur Michael Samuel and Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Piranesi* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1912); Albert Giesecke, *Studien über Giov. Batt. Piranesi* (Leipzig, 1911).

<sup>13</sup> Ulya Vogt-Göknil and Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi "Carceri"* (Zuerich: Origo Verl., 1958); Patricia May Sekler, *Notes on Old and Modern Drawings. Giovanni Battista Piranesi's Carceri Etchings and Related Drawings*. (Haarlem: Pr. y. Enschedé, 1962).

<sup>14</sup> In the Introduction of the first Italian edition of Henri Focillon, Maurizio Calvesi set the correspondence of thought of authors such as Giambattista Vico (1668 – 1744) regarding the origins of the Italic civilization in the *Carceri*. The publication is Giambattista Piranesi et al., *Giovanni Battista Piranesi* (Bologna: Alfa, 1967).

In addition, the impressive number of exhibitions on Piranesi's production, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, shed new light on him and stimulated scholarship that incorporated the theoretical nature of his work. For instance, in 1978 the Venetian *Fondazione Giorgio Cini* organized a symposium to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Piranesi's death. The event represented a large step towards a scholarship free of the biases of Romanticism. Many scholars from different nationalities, including Calvesi, contributed with new sources and approaches to Piranesian studies. The event culminated with the book *Piranesi Tra Venezia e L'Europa* - a vital item in my bibliography.<sup>15</sup>

Documents formerly ignored or unknown have also contributed to a new avenue of investigation on Piranesi and to the scholarship of the *Carceri*. Mario Bevilacqua, for instance, in the book *Taccuini di Modena* of 2008, published the reproduction of one of Piranesi's notebooks, which is currently in the Biblioteca Estense Universitaria in Modena, Italy.<sup>16</sup> Bevilacqua's analysis accompanied the reproductions of years of the artist's preparatory drawings, quick sketches, and notes on various subjects, revealing his strong involvement with intellectual debates once more.

The most recent studies considerably boosted the scholarship on Piranesi, but the *Carceri* received very scarce or no attention. In the twentieth-first century, the rich lineage of Piranesian studies continued focusing on Piranesi's erudition. John Pinto published the book *Speaking Ruins* in 2012 focusing on the architectural heritage of classical antiquity that Piranesi provided and the fundamental role he played in shaping

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<sup>15</sup> Maurizio Calvesi, "Ideologia e Riferimenti delle 'Carceri,'" in *Piranesi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, ed. Alessandro Bettagno and Istituto di storia dell'arte (Fondazione "Giorgio Cini") (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1983), 339–60; Maurizio Calvesi and Calcografia Nazionale (Rom), Giovanni Battista e Francesco Piranesi: Calcografia Nazionale, 1967 - 1968 (DeLuca, 1967).

<sup>16</sup> Mario Bevilacqua, *Piranesi: Taccuini di Modena*, 2 vols., Biblioteca estense (Modena, Italy) (Roma: Artemide, 2008).

our contemporary view of the Roman past.<sup>17</sup> In 2014, Colin Holden published *Piranesi's Grandest Tour from Europe to Australia* highlighting Piranesi as a printmaker and publisher.<sup>18</sup> The author stressed Piranesi's importance to the Grand Tourists of the eighteenth century, to collectors of the following centuries, and to contemporary artists in different parts of the globe, especially in Australia and New Zealand.

Finally, two books from 2015 complete the list of recent publications about Piranesi that either ignore or only superficially mention the *Carceri*. Australian collections inspired Kerriane Stone and Gerard Vaughan, who published *The Piranesi Effect* in 2015.<sup>19</sup> The book is a compendium of essays from different scholars who found inspiration in the works of Piranesi in the country's museums and galleries. Although the *Carceri* were object of two essays, the authors largely relied on the twentieth-century formalist and architectural perspectives. The first analyzed the extent in which the imaginary prisons fit into the genre of *capriccio* and the second focused on the architectural possibilities that Piranesi experimented through the spaces of the *Carceri*.<sup>20</sup>

Digging deep into Piranesi's writings, Heather Hyde Minor published *Piranesi's Lost Words* in that same year.<sup>21</sup> She explores Piranesi's ambitions and achievements as an author. Her focus, however, was investigating Piranesi's *modus operandi* in combining images and words for "breathtakingly creative results in his books."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John A. Pinto, *Speaking Ruins: Piranesi, Architects and Antiquity in Eighteenth-Century Rome*, Jerome Lectures, twenty-fourth series (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Colin Holden, *Piranesi's Grandest Tour. From Europe to Australia*. (Randwick: Unireps UNSW, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Long, "The Piranesi Effect," in *The Piranesi Effect*, ed. Kerriane Stone and Gerard Vaughan (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2015), 44–58.

<sup>20</sup> David R. Marshall, "Piranesi's Creative Imagination: The Capriccio and the Carceri," in *The Piranesi Effect*, ed. Kerriane Stone and Gerard Vaughan (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2015), 111–34; Warren Andrews, "Irrational Architecture in the Carceri d'Invenzione," in *The Piranesi Effect*, ed. Kerriane Stone and Gerard Vaughan (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2015), 135–48.

<sup>21</sup> Heather Hyde Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Minor, 9.



This very brief review reveals that the most up-to-date scholarship focusing on Piranesi's intellectual achievements omitted the *Carceri*. The revelation of Piranesi's erudition and his ideological inclinations in the *Carceri* is part of a process that requires the revision on the scholarship of his other works first. The goal of my thesis is to overcome this gap, contributing to fill the blanks on the *Carceri*'s scholarship and stimulating new approaches to the *Carceri*.

### 1.3 METHODOLOGIES

Formal and iconographical analyses are the cornerstones of my research. Although an apparently obvious and embryonic step in the discipline of Art History, the two methodologies were a game changer. Instead of just looking to the images and assuming I had seen them enough, I described each one in text. I visually scrutinized the sixteen etchings and identified the most recurrent objects and references to which Piranesi alluded. Aiming at an unbiased inspection of Piranesi's illustrations, free from other scholars' examinations, my preliminary approach was to temporarily put the vast literature available aside and see the imaginary prisons with "fresh" eyes. In this sense, the illustrations were themselves my main primary source. It was through the textual description of each of the sixteen etchings that I could perceive the different elements Piranesi depicted, their possible meanings, and the relationship between them. It was through the written formal analysis that I had to define and name the ambiguous objects of the *Carceri*.

After a close visual examination and the identification of the principal objects on the etchings, I categorized my findings. The iconographical analysis followed the

categorization of the elements. I explored the cultural production of the eighteenth century to find precedents, analogies, and influences. I also examined Piranesi's pertinent previous and subsequent works. The objective was to establish relationships and connections with the *Carceri*'s imagery and the rest of his oeuvre. In this phase, I used both primary and secondary sources to decipher the meanings that Piranesi conveyed in the illustrations.

Combining the identification of the objects in the formal and iconographical analysis with the most recent scholarship on Piranesi, I started to connect the dots. Many of the attitudes and inclinations Piranesi demonstrated in his "written" publications were already present in the *Carceri*, albeit in images rather than words. I found the same points he made in other publications metaphorically addressed in the imaginary prisons. Piranesi's main concern was with the stubborn defense of the superiority of Roman over Greek civilization, especially through the praise of the magnificence of Rome engineering and law.

Based on the assumption that the *Carceri d'Invenzione* was an intellectual construction rather than an automatic expression of Piranesi's psyche, I was interested in the reasons that compelled Piranesi to create and then recreate the illustrations of imaginary prisons. The number of editions and the radical reworking of the plates demonstrates the degree of the artist's devotion and commitment to the illustrations. I investigated the context of the first edition of the fourteen etchings of *Invenzioni capric. de Carceri* (1749-50) and surveyed the alterations he did for the second edition of 1761. Then, I identified the elements that Piranesi emphasized, removed, or added as a means to better communicate his ideas.

For the detailed analysis of each of the themes I identified, other methodologies came into play. I heavily relied on the connoisseurship and formalism of authors such as Andrew Robinson, Luigi Ficacci, and John Wilton-Ely. These authors explored the many states of the etchings that Piranesi produced, highlighting in side-by-side comparisons their alterations. Robinson goes as far as examining the origin of the paper and pigments Piranesi used to infer the locale and date of the prints. These authors also helped me to compare Piranesi's technical development through features such as the linework and etching techniques in the decade that intermediate the two editions.<sup>23</sup>

I sought to trace Piranesi's philosophical and ideological alignments through his colleagues, patrons, collaborators, and friends to identify his thoughts about the *Carceri*.<sup>24</sup> A biographical and psychological approach to his oeuvre elucidated many points during my research. In contrast to the biographies, predominantly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that focused on Piranesi's tormented personality to justify the *Carceri*, recent biographical reviews shed light on Piranesi's intellectual profile. Similarly, I focused on his education and on the intellectual circles in which he participated, in both Venice and Rome, to recognize possible sources that might have inspired him and debates in which he participated.

#### 1.4 THE DEBATES IN THE *CARCERI*

Far from a spontaneous epiphany, the illustrations are a meticulously thought-out

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<sup>23</sup> See Andrew Robison and Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Piranesi-Early Architectural Fantasies: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings* (Washington: Chicago: National Gallery of Art; University of Chicago Press, 1986); Piranesi, Ficacci, and Lamers-Schütze, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*; John Wilton-Ely, *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978).

<sup>24</sup> Heather Hyde Minor's book *Piranesi's Lost Words* was a source of paramount relevance. She focuses on Piranesi's legacy as an author rather than artist or architect. Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*.

enterprise that required historical research, philosophical inquiry, and a keen comprehension of Piranesi's own time. No aspect of cultural production went unnoticed by the loud Piranesi. Piranesi located himself in the very heart of all of the mainstream debates of the *settecento*. Marguerite Yourcenar, author of *The Dark Brain of Piranesi*, states that "all the eighteenth-century angles of incidence and reflection intersect in the strange linear universe of Giovanni Battista Piranesi."<sup>25</sup> He actively and sometimes furiously participated in the discussions that ranged from the appropriateness of styles in Architecture to the origins of Italic civilization; from the superiority of classical over modern culture to the Greco-Roman controversy. It was with this censorious Piranesi in mind that I faced the etchings of the *Carceri*.

Piranesi intentionally provided different clues for the different audiences of the *Carceri*. The multifaceted intellectual background of Piranesi explains the intensity of the theoretical and philosophical content of the *Carceri*. To access the illustrations' content, it is necessary to have the right keys. In this game Piranesi played, just like in a prison, master keys unlock different stages of significance of the ambiguous objects he depicted. Nonetheless, like his words, many of Piranesi's keys were lost at some point. The front door key, representing the most superficial level of significance, is independent from any scholarship: along the centuries, his audience was always equipped with the key that exposes the illustrations' mysterious beauty and technical mastery. The etchings captivate our gaze and evoke mixed feelings of fascination and strangeness.

Anchored in the historical context in which Piranesi created the etchings and, specially, in his intellectual capability, I propose connections with contemporary debates

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<sup>25</sup> Marguerite Yourcenar, *The Dark Brain of Piranesi and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), 94.

and events that arose around him. The Greco-Roman controversy is one of the most important keys to unlock the *Carceri*. Beyond an aesthetic debate, it encompassed a moral lesson within the comparison of the two cradles of Western civilization. Piranesi's archaeological and philosophical enquiries of the origins of the Italic civilization aimed at proving the superior character of the Romans. I claim that, in the *Carceri*, Piranesi went further to demonstrate that Roman civilization reached its apogee before the influence of the Greeks. As his oeuvre demonstrates, it was a personal matter throughout his life. Piranesi spent his entire career trying to impose this point through many publications, including the *Carceri*.

The theoretical and philosophical content addressing this debate is one of the most important contributions of Venice to the *Carceri* and to Piranesi's subsequent works. His passion for the ancient Romans started within his family. His brother was a Carthusian monk that provided classical books and some knowledge in Latin, not to mention the admiration for Livy.<sup>26</sup> It was in Venice that Piranesi developed the concept of "*Romanità* and its roots in the time of the kings and early Republic; also the origins of Italic civilization in the Etruscans," summarizes John Wilton-Ely.<sup>27</sup>

In Rome, Piranesi replaced the intellectual circles of Venice for the *Accademia degli Arcadi*, which allowed him to keep up with the debates. This academy, founded in 1690, was probably the most influential of the many literary societies in the passage of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. The grandiose ambition of the Arcadia's members went far beyond a literary reform. Besides freeing the literature from the Baroque style, the *arcadi* wanted a reform of society as a whole. By vehemently rejecting

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<sup>26</sup> Bevilacqua, Taccuini di Modena, 269.

<sup>27</sup> Wilton-Ely, *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, 88.

baroque excesses and using classicism as the source for ideal models, their aspirations were to promote a wide ethical revision. “Arcadianism was a cultural fact of primary importance in the settecento,” says Vernon Hyde Minor.<sup>28</sup> In the eighteenth century, the concepts of ethics, virtue, and truth were closely connected to taste, and, in this vein, the *arcadi* deeply engaged in their endeavor towards the improvement of the society. Their debates, thus, covered a broad scope of subjects, including mathematics, physics, and, especially influential for the *Carceri*, jurisprudence.<sup>29</sup>

Piranesi knew that the members of the *Arcadia* were part of the audience of the *Carceri* and directed many specific comments to some of them. The series of illustrations of imaginary prisons and its outstanding amount of references to both past and contemporary debates is an exemplar of how Piranesi used his works to imbue censures to his ideological adversaries. The *Carceri* is, therefore, one in a long lineage of “response-publications” that Piranesi produced with an unequivocal purpose of attacking opponents.

Piranesi was accepted as a member of the prestigious academy circa 1744, approximately one year after the publication of his first book, *Prima Parte di Architteture e Prospettive* (1743). It is more than reasonable to assume that Piranesi directed his following works towards subjects of arcadian interest. His election must have had a huge impact on a young “outsider” artist struggling to establish himself in Rome. It was a way of making a name for himself. He expressed his enthusiasm in the title page of the second issue of

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<sup>28</sup> Vernon Hyde Minor, “Ideology and Interpretation in Rome’s Parrhasian Grove: The Arcadian Garden and Taste,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 46 (2001): 184, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4238785>.

<sup>29</sup> Susan M. Dixon, “Women in Arcadia,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 3 (1999): 371–75.

*Prima Parte*, in which he altered the lettering by adding, after the title and the author, his arcadian name: *fra gli arcadi Salcindio Tiseio* (figures 1.1 and 1.2).

The academy and its prominent members had a potential catalytic power to provide many network opportunities to Piranesi, although they took a long time to come.<sup>30</sup> It was a place where the “shepherd” Piranesi, as the members were called, would rely on theoretical debates to develop his art and to attract the prospective patrons he was desperately seeking. Piranesi could benefit by referencing the debates in his work, relying on the most up-to-date subjects for his production. To pay homage to the academy and honor their membership, both artists and patrons alluded to the themes of the academy’s interest in their works.<sup>31</sup>

The relationship between Piranesi’s acceptance and the intellectual inclinations of the academy was worked both ways. Richard Wendorf attributes the election of the artist to this academy to the highly valued “symbolic forms that were emerging in [Piranesi’s] *capricci*.”<sup>32</sup> The election undoubtedly denoted an intellectual alignment between him and the academy. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that *Prima Parte* had been his only publication up to his election. Piranesi’s most “symbolic forms” came in the following publications: the *Grotteschi* and the series of imaginary prisons that he appropriately named *Invenzioni capric[ciose] di Carceri* (capricious inventions of prisons).

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<sup>30</sup> To highlight the importance of the academy, figures from the highest echelon of the Roman intellectual scene were Arcadia’s members. Besides the founders Giovan Mario Crescimbeni and Gianvincenzo Gravina, the society counted with Gian Francesco Albani (Pope Clement XI from 1700 to 1721), Michelangelo dei Conte (Pope Innocent XIII from 1721 to 1724), Francesco Bianchini (acquaintance of Piranesi), the famous improvisatore Mestastasio, Ludovico Antonio Muratori, among others. Vernon Hyde Minor, in an article in which the author explores the iconography of the academy’s gardens, proposes a parallel between these pasture and the Florentine humanistic circles of Marsilio Ficino, Lorenzo de’ Medici, Cristoforo Landino, and Pico della Mirandola in the fifteenth-century. They were in the foremost rank in the intellectual production and debate in *Settecento Romano*.

<sup>31</sup> Liliana Barroero and Stefano Susinno, “Arcadian Rome, Universal Capital of the Arts,” in *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Edgar Peters Bowron and Joseph J Rishel, n.d.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Wendorf, “Piranesi’s Double Ruin,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 2 (2001): 168.

At last, the examination of the academy's members constitutes an irrefutable proof of the theoretical influence of the *Arcadi* on Piranesi.<sup>33</sup> Names that will appear throughout the thesis, such as Giambattista Vico (1668 – 1744), Gian Vincenzo Gravina (1664 – 1718), Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672 – 1750), Luigi Vanvitelli (1700 – 1773), Giovanni Gaetano Bottari (1689 – 1775), among many others, were all shepherds of the *Arcadia* and figures to whom Piranesi was directing image-based commentary. Piranesi incorporated the debates and criticisms of the *Carceri* in his subsequent works throughout his life.

## 1.5 THESIS STRUCTURE

I structured the body of my thesis in four chapters. Following Chapter One (Introduction), Chapter Two accounts for the formal and iconographical analyses. I identified the most recurrent objects and separated them in three main categories: (1) ancient Roman elements, (2) nautical elements, and (3) torture devices. I analyzed Piranesi's references to specific places and historical and contemporary events within the categories and associated one particular debate to each. The debates Piranesi addressed, in turn, are not exclusive of the *Carceri*. On the contrary, they are found elsewhere in Piranesi's works and correspond to broad debates of the eighteenth century.

Due to the ambiguity of the objects and the wide range of possible interpretations that they offer, the three categories intersected and even overlapped each other in many

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<sup>33</sup> Among the members that played a more specific role to Piranesi's career are Giovanni Battista Vico, for example. In close alignment with Piranesi, Vico, a "philosopher of the origins," defended the independence of Latin's original language, philosophy, and law from Greeks, attributing, instead, the Italic civilization's origins to the Ionians and Etruscans. In addition, this author stressed "the important role played by fantastical resources in reconstructing knowledge," an artifice that Piranesi used abundantly in the *Carceri*.



points. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity, I examined them separately in each of the subsequent chapters (Three, Four, and Five).

In Chapter Three, I covered the Roman elements and the association with the debate on taste. Piranesi positioned himself in this debate by attacking Baroque and the philhellenism that strongly emerged with authors such as Le Roy, Allan Ramsay, and Winckelmann. I also addressed Piranesi's criticism of the patronage system of eighteenth-century Rome.

In Chapter Four, I analyzed the presence of nautical elements in the *Carceri* and Piranesi's references to the magnificence of Roman engineering. The nautical elements are also associated to the environment of Venice. Piranesi employed not only the visual repertoire he witnessed in his hometown, but also the theoretical precepts that he absorbed during his Venetian education. Additionally, in this chapter I examined the difficult times that Piranesi experienced in the beginning of his career and how his comings and goings between Venice and Rome influenced the imagery of the *Carceri*.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I analyzed Piranesi's discourse on the correspondence between law and taste to affirm the superiority of Rome over Greece. Additionally, Piranesi wanted to demonstrate the pernicious influence of the Greek culture in Rome. Through the depiction of torture devices and the reference to specific episodes on the history of ancient Rome, Piranesi proposed an analogy between ancient Rome and his own time.

At last, it is vital to highlight the distinction between the two main editions of the illustrations of the imaginary prisons. My analysis focused mainly in the second edition, published in 1761 and titled *Carceri d'Invenzione* (Appendix A – Figures A.1 to A.16),

in that this edition is the most complete and developed, showing the intellectual maturity of Piranesi. The analysis of the first edition, *Invenzioni capric. di Carceri* (Appendix B – Figures B.1 to B.14) was a support material to anchor my inferences. Therefore, unless otherwise mentioned, I referred to the plates of the second edition.



Figure 1.2 Title page of *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive* (first state). From: *Prima Parte di Architettura, e Prospettive inventate, ed incise da Giambattista Piranesi Architetto Veneziano*. Roma, 1743.



Figure 1.1 Title page of *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive* (second state), with the distinction of the *Accademia degli Arcadi*.

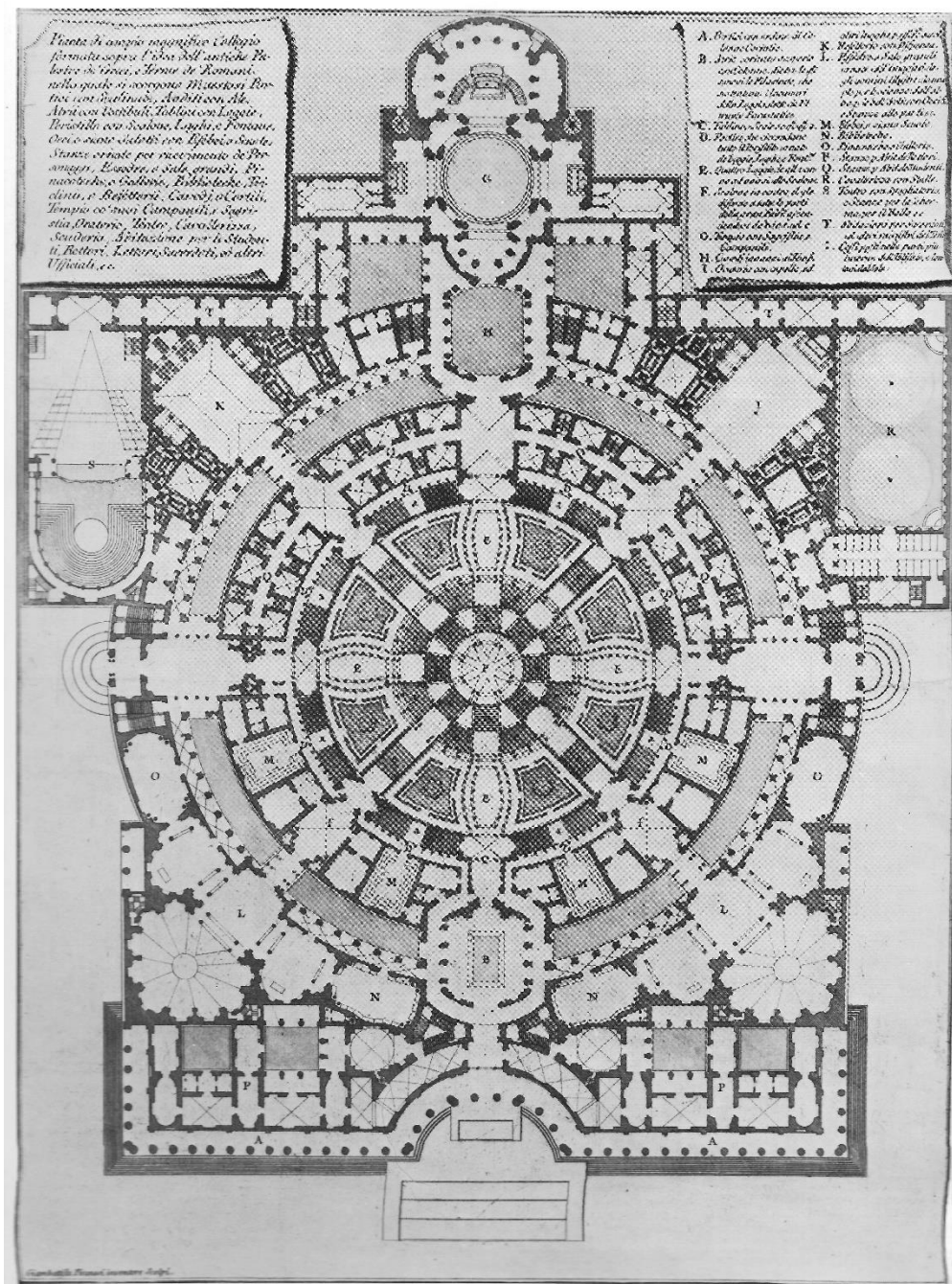


Figure 1.3 *Pianta di ampio magnifico collegio*. From: Robison, Andrew, and Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Piranesi-Early Architectural Fantasies: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings*. Washington: Chicago: National Gallery of Art; University of Chicago Press, 1986, cat. no. 25.

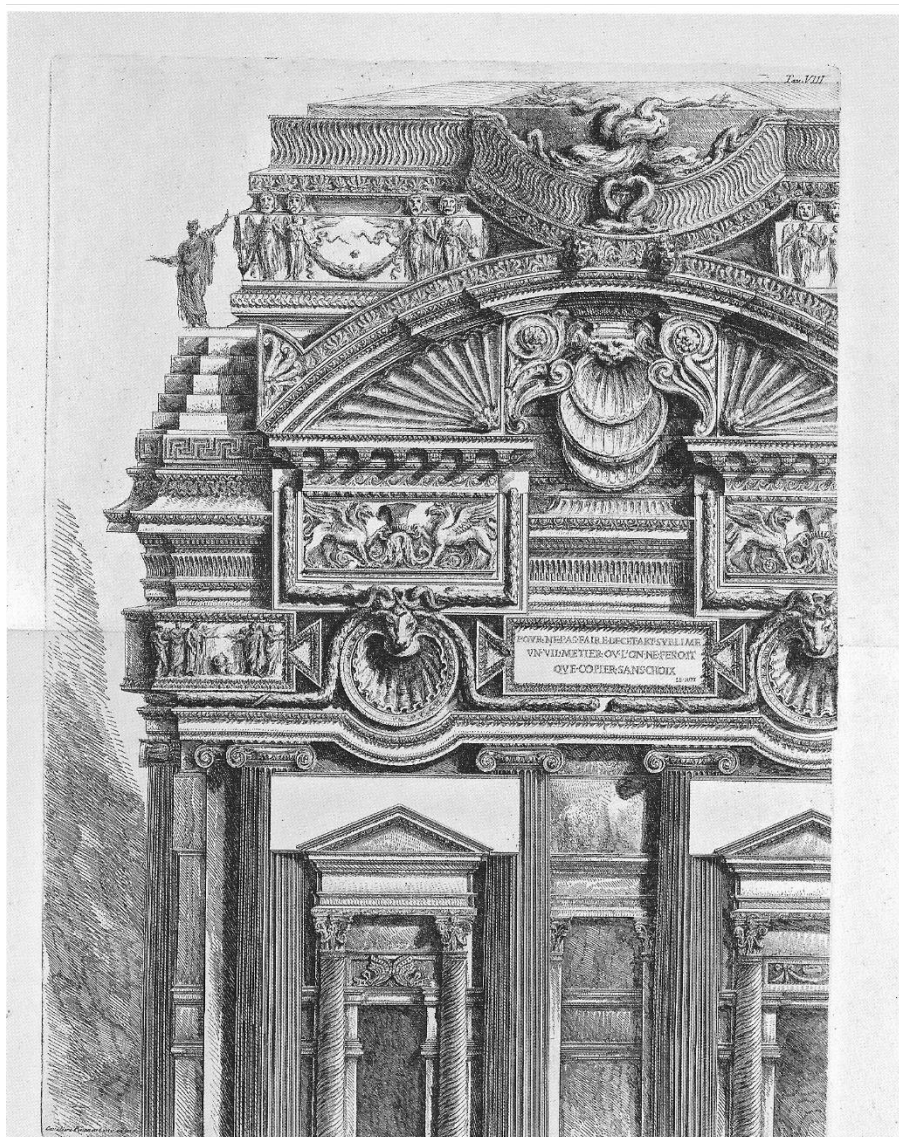


Figure 1.4 Page of *Parere su l'Architettura*. From: *Osservazioni di Gio. Batista Piranesi sopra la Lettre de M. Mariette aux auteurs de la Gazette de l'Europe: inserita nel supplemento dell'istessa gazzetta stampata Dimanche 4, Novembre MDCCLIV & parere su l'architettura, con una prefazione ad un nuovo tratatto della introduzione e del progresso delle belle arti in Europa ne' tempi antichi*. In Roma: [Per Generoso Salomoni], 1765.

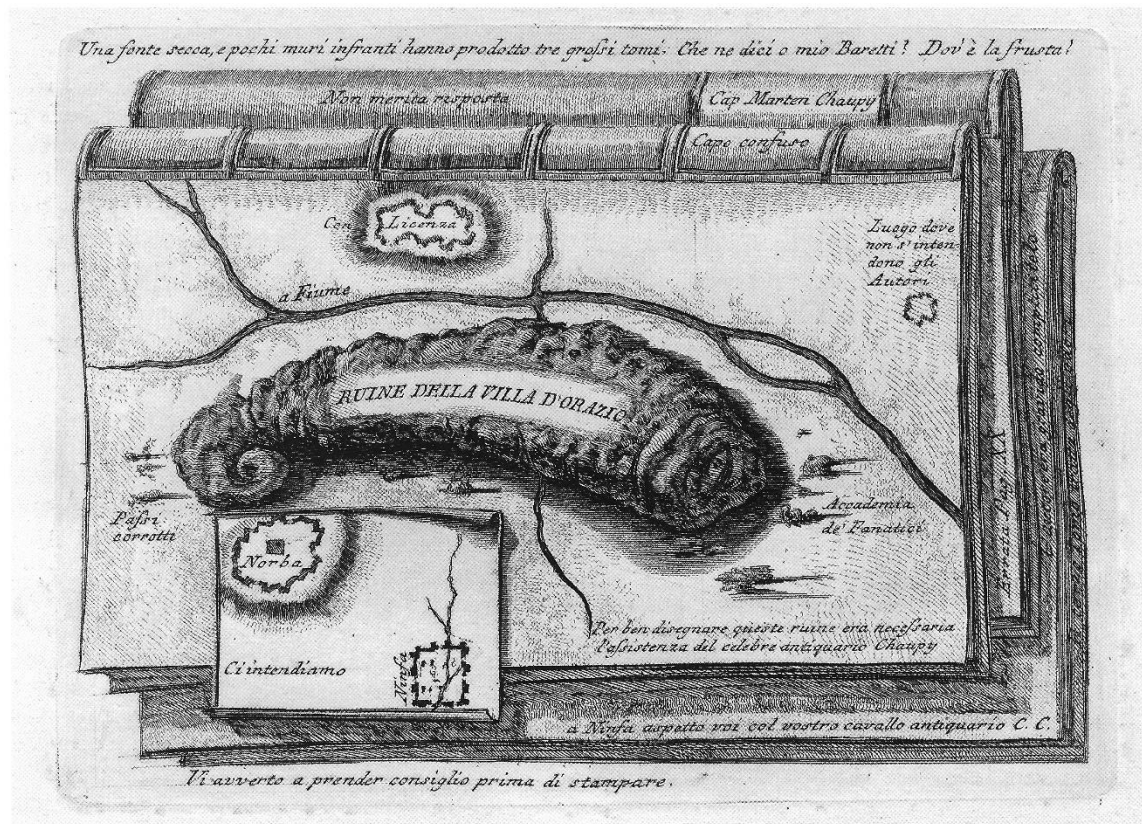


Figure 1.5 Horace's villa in *Diverse Maniere di Adornare I Camini*. From: *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini: ed ogni altra parte degli edifizj desunte dall'architettura Egizia, Etrusca, e Greca con un ragionamento apologetico in difesa dell'architettura Egizia e Toscana*. In Roma: Nella stamperia di Generoso Salomoni, 1769.



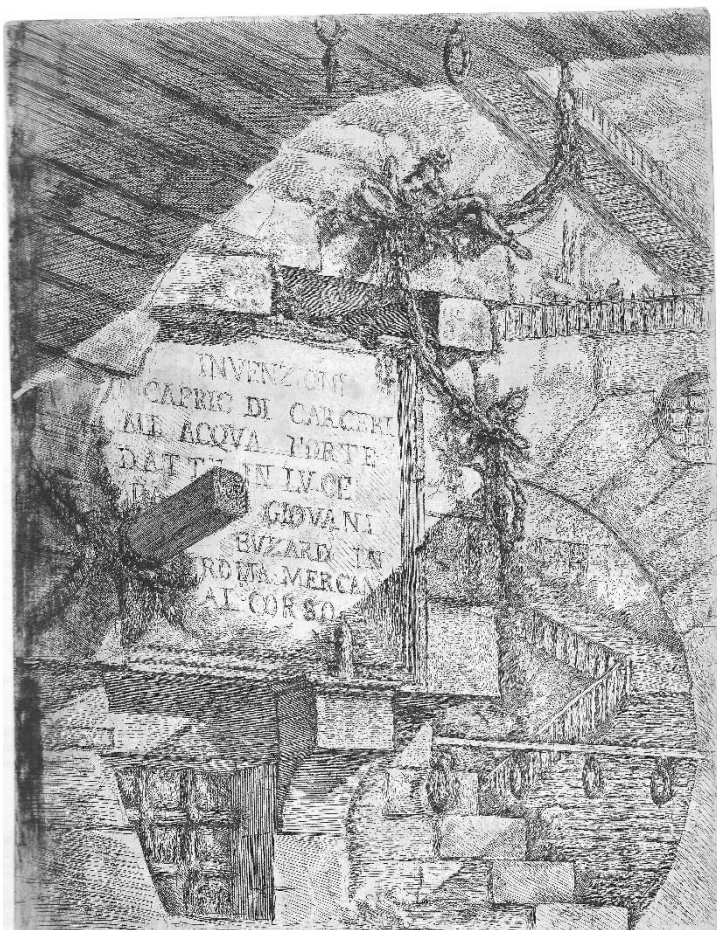


Figure 1.6 Title page of *Invenzioni capric. di Carceri* (first state), with the misprint of the name “Buzard.”

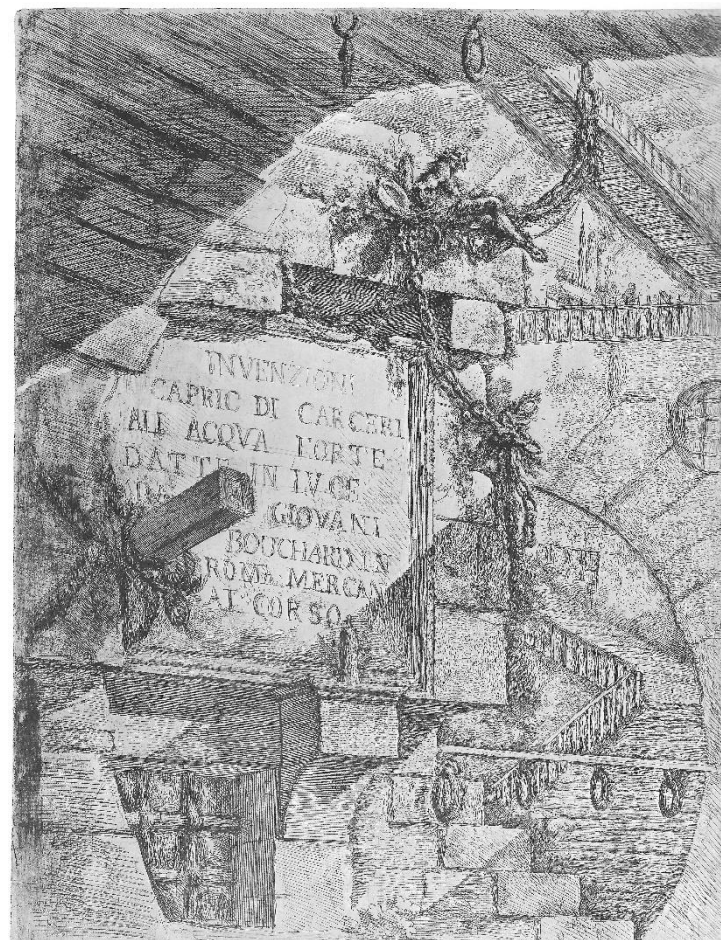


Figure 1.7 Title page of *Invenzioni capric. di Carceri* (second state,) with the name of Bouchard fixed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FORMAL AND ICONOGRAPHICAL ANALYSES

The sixteen plates that constitute the *Carceri d'Invenzione* (1761), depicting what Piranesi himself called “prisons of imagination,” are large etchings that the artist created between the 1740s and 1760s.<sup>34</sup> The publication had several issues in two different editions during Piranesi’s life, and a third posthumously edition. The first edition was published in 1749-50 with fourteen plates. Piranesi published a second edition in 1761 in which he revised the existing fourteen plates and added two new ones.

The classical nomenclature of the plates comes from Andrew Robinson’s catalogue raisonné.<sup>35</sup> On the right column, I presented an alternative nomenclature that suggests a slight change in the illustrations’ perception.<sup>36</sup> I do not intend to problematize the attribution of titles to the etchings. Nonetheless, it is important to take into account that titles reveal and inform a specific way of looking and defining the illustrations. Andrew Robinson’s titles show a permanence of the Romantic perspective on the interpretation of the illustrations and a strong root in the Formalist approaches of the beginning of the twentieth century. In some plates, the title focuses on secondary elements in terms of significance, as in plate XVI. Although not completely unimportant, “The Pier with Chains,” as we shall see, are accessories to a rich set of references and

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<sup>34</sup> For the etching technique of Piranesi in the *Carceri*, see Silvia Gavuzzo-Stewart, *Nelle Carceri Di G.B. Piranesi*, Italian Perspectives 2 (Leeds, UK: Northern Universities Press, 1999), chap. 1. L’acquaforte: la tecnica di Piranesi.

<sup>35</sup> Robison and Piranesi, *Piranesi--Early Architectural Fantasies*.

<sup>36</sup> The authors of the alternative nomenclature are John Howe and Philip Hofer.



debates that are paramount to understand the whole series of the *Carceri*.

Table 2.1 Number, name, and date of plates in *Carceri d'Invenzione*.

Number	Name (Robinson/Ficacci)	Name (Howe and Hofer) <sup>37</sup>	Date
I	Title-page	Title-page	1749/50
II	The Man in the Rack	Carcere, with a Larger Number of Human and Sculptured Figures	1761
III	The Round Tower	Carcere, with a Circular Tower	1749/50
IV	The Grand Piazza	Carcere, with a View Through an Arch Toward a Bridge with a Sculptured Frieze. Below, a Colonnade Reminiscent of St. Peter's Square in Rome	1749/50
V	The Lion Bas-Reliefs	Carcere, like plate II, with Similar Elaborate Paraphernalia	1761
VI	The Smoking Fire	Carcere, with Arches and Pulleys and a Smoking Fire in the Center	1749/50
VII	The Drawbridge	Carcere, with Numerous Wooden Galleries and a Drawbridge	1749/50
VIII	The Staircase with Trophies	Carcere, with a Staircase Flanked by Military Trophies	1749/50
IX	The Giant Wheel	Carcere, with a Doorway Surmounted by a Colossal Wheel-shape Opening	1749/50
X	Prisoners on a Projecting Platform	Carcere, with a Group of Captives Chained to Posts	1749/50
XI	The Arch with a Shell Ornament	Carcere, with a Central Hanging Lantern	1749/50
XII	The Sawhorse	Carcere, with a Platform Approached by Steps	1749/50
XIII	The Well	Carcere, with Several Straight, Broad Central Staircases	1749/50
XIV	The Gothic Arch	Carcere, with a Staircase Ascending to the Left	1749/50
XV	The Pier with a Lamp	Carcere, with Vaults Springing from a Monumental Pier	1749/50
XVI	The Pier with Chains	Carcere, with a High Gallery Beyond a Low, Timbered Anteroom	1749/50

Piranesi had not numerated the plates until the second issue of the second edition.<sup>38</sup> The use of Roman numbers was an essential move towards clarifying the

<sup>37</sup> Giovanni Battista Piranesi, John Howe, and Philip Hofer, *The Prisons / Le Carceri*, Bilingual edition (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Malcolm Campbell, *Piranesi: The Dark Prisons: An Edition of the Carceri d' Invenzione from the Collection of The Arthur Ross Foundation*, exh. cat., The Italian Cultural Institute (New York: The Foundation, 1988), 31.

narrative of the illustrations. The sequence of plates as Piranesi assigned follows a reversed chronological order that goes from the Julio-Claudian Empire (27 BCE – 68 CE) back to the regal period of Tullus Hostilius (reign 673 – 642 BCE). Piranesi represented the former through the reference to the enemies of the emperor Nero in plate II. He represented the latter through the reference to the construction of the Mamertine prison and to the trial of the Horatii brothers in plate XVI. The events that composed this temporal line brought up important arguments for the Greco-Roman controversy.

All the etchings have similar measurements, either in vertical or horizontal orientations, with the largest side varying between 560 and 540 mm and the smallest ranging from 420 to 400 mm. In this epoch, Rome's publishing industry was famous for illustrated books with elephant folios and Piranesi cleverly took advantage of this expertise.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.1 COMPOSITIONAL STRATEGIES

In terms of compositional schemes, Piranesi used a very theatrical approach to the illustrations. He created a metaphorical play in which his prisons constituted the stage, while his audience was under the proscenium arch. Through his deliberate manipulation of the audience's view and emotions, Piranesi reached the highly dramatic effect of his compositions. In the foreground, very close to the observer's point of view, he depicted parts of an architectural element, be it a pillar, an archway, a pier, a wall, etc. By positioning the viewer on this strategic place within the composition, he framed the whole illustration. Like spotlights in a theatrical play, Piranesi used the light to

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<sup>39</sup> Minor, Piranesi's Lost Words.

emphasize the elements he desired. He achieved a sense of intimacy and an almost tactile connection between the beholders and the scenes. Many scholars attribute Piranesi's "envelopment" method to his previous experience with theater design.<sup>40</sup> Concerning the *vedute*, John Pinto asserts that "Piranesi encourages the observer to view Roman architecture directly, from within, thus heightening the immediacy of the experience."<sup>41</sup> Before the *vedute*, nonetheless, Piranesi had experimented with this technique with outstanding results in the *Carceri*.

Except for plate IX, the illustrations show the point of view of a hypothetical observer positioned in an interior space where the exits are inaccessible or non-existent. However, most of the etchings do not bring any reference to a possible escape. Instead, they show an agonizing succession of flights of stairs, bridges, archways, and doors that lead nowhere. Even when looking towards the outside of the building, as in plate IV, the exterior does not suggest freedom. Piranesi inverted exterior and interior, creating infinite interiors confined in limited exteriors.

The spaces Piranesi depicted are vast, both horizontally and vertically. Some authors call attention to the vastness of Piranesi's prisons in contrast to the claustrophobic configuration that any incarceration space presents. Nonetheless, prisons with cells were not standard in medieval and early modern Europe.<sup>42</sup> There is a sense of confinement in the paradoxical vastness of the inviable architecture Piranesi created for the etchings.

The illustrations of the *Carceri* exhibit three main categories of elements that, in

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<sup>40</sup> I borrowed the term "envelopment" from John Pinto in *Speaking Ruins*. See Pinto, *Speaking Ruins*, 111.

<sup>41</sup> Pinto, 111.

<sup>42</sup> Hanns Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment: The Post-Tridentine Syndrome and the Ancien Regime*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

turn, define the themes that Piranesi wanted to address. Below, I identified these categories and demonstrated their recurrence, associating them with the historical context. Each theme will be properly examined in the following chapters.

## 2.2 ROMAN ELEMENTS

Piranesi used the history of ancient Rome as a guide to model and promote good taste, “the great debate of the eighteenth-century.”<sup>43</sup> In its broad connotation, taste surpasses the arts and architecture realm and incorporates ethical concepts such as morals, politics, and justice. The rejection of the baroque, the recent discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii, and the arousal of neoclassicism greatly increased the debate about taste. And, of course, Piranesi was deeply engaged in all of these debates.

Plates II and XVI present the most direct references to ancient Roman history and constitute decisive keys to comprehend Piranesi’s intentions with the *Carceri*. On the top of plate II, over a stone arch, Piranesi depicted two plaques attached to the wall. The plaque to the right presents three busts with their corresponding names incised below them. To the left side, only the bottom part of the bust and the name are visible. The symmetrical arrangement that the arch suggests indicates the continuity of the left plaque out of the pictorial space of the etching. It is implicit, therefore, that two more busts belong to that plaque. From the left to the right, the first name that appears is “GRACVS”. In the right side, the lettering reads “PANICIVSCER,” LANNAEYSMEL,” and “CPETRONIVS.”

Piranesi used the references to conjure up subjects that he wished to call into

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<sup>43</sup> Vernon Hyde Minor, *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

question, inviting his audience to meditate on them. He depicted four Roman figures that have in common the fact that they were reformists that challenged Romans' *status quo*. They all had fallen under the *lex maiestatis*, or Law of Treason, and were punished with similar death penalties.<sup>44</sup>

GRACVS is a reference for Tiberius Gracchus (c. 169-164 – 133 BCE), a Roman politician who promoted agrarian reforms in the Roman Republic<sup>45</sup> The other three, on the other side of the arch, belong to the imperial period. PANICIVSCER refers to the Roman senator Gaius Anicius Cerialis (d. 66 CE). LANNAEVSMEL is Lucius Annaeus Mela, or Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC – 65 CE), another Roman political agitator. Finally, CPETRONIVS is Gaius Petronius Arbiter (c. 27 – 66 CE), a Roman courtier, attributed author of the *Satyricon*. Gracchus was murdered by members of the Roman Senate. The punishment of the convicted Anicius Cerealis, Annaeus Mela, and Petronius was mandated suicide.

On the lower portion of the illustration, Piranesi incised three more names on the tablets attached to a pilaster, corresponding to the heads in bas-relief above the names: L BAREA... ORAN (Barea Soranus), MTRASE...PAE (Thrasea Paetus), and ...TISTIVS...(Antistius).<sup>46</sup> They are all figures that the historian Tacitus cited in

*Annals*.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Lex maiestatis*, or Law of Majestas, encompasses Roman Imperial and Republican laws dealing with crimes against the Roman people, state, or Emperor.

<sup>45</sup> Gavuzzo-Stewart proposes that, instead of GRACVS, Piranesi incised GRATVS, referring to Munatius Gratus, an opponent of Nero. Considering the timeline that Piranesi suggested, I believe that, as Piranesi referred to two different periods in plate XVI (Kingdom and Republic), so he referred to two periods in plate II (Republic and Empire). Moreover, with Gracchus Piranesi could be demonstrating the beginning of the Hellenist culture in Rome, which culminated with the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, especially Nero. See Gavuzzo-Stewart, *Nelle Carceri Di G.B. Piranesi*, 137.

<sup>46</sup> For the identification of the names on the tablets, I followed Andrew Robinson's interpretation. For the names at the top of the plate, nonetheless, the author misread GRACUS as "GRATVS" in *Piranesi – Early Architectural Fantasies*.

<sup>47</sup> Robison and Piranesi, *Piranesi--Early Architectural Fantasies*, 49.

With the citation of Tacitus, Piranesi situated his audience in a specific time of the Roman Empire. The collection of books that constitute the *Annals* covered the history of Rome from 14 to 68 CE, encompassing, except for Augustus, the reigns of the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero.

Likewise, in plate XVI, Piranesi provided three references to specific points on the timeline of ancient Roman history. He located the first clue almost in the center of the plate, in a prominent gravestone which darker tone stands out against its bright background. On the upper portion of the slab, he depicted two heads installed in two separate niches. Scholars associate the heads with an episode in Livy's *History of Rome* (*Ab Urbe condita libri*).<sup>48</sup>

Piranesi was positioning his viewer among certain Roman historical actors, places, or epochs to make points about his own opinion about their past actions. The heads belonged to Titus and Tiberius Junius Brutus. Beheaded by the order of their own father, the founder of the Roman Republic Lucius Junius Brutus, the two brothers and their uncles Vitellii were caught in a conspiracy to restore the monarchy in Rome. The consul Lucius not only presided the trial of his sons but also witnessed their torture and execution.

The second clue is on the top of the etching and, chronologically, goes back to the transition between the Roman Kingdom to the Republic. Under the capital of a palmform Egyptian column, Piranesi inscribed the lettering “AD TERROREM INCRESCEN  
AVDACIAS.” Taken from Livy, *Ad terrorem increscentis audaciae* translates as “to

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<sup>48</sup> The book was the most cited publication in Piranesi's *Campus Martius*, for instance, and Livy was Piranesi's favorite ancient author. See Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*.

terrify the increasing audacity.”<sup>49</sup> It is a quotation attributed to Ancus Martius (642 – 617 BCE), the king elected by the people, when ordering the construction of the first Roman prison, the current *Carcere Mamertino* (Mamertine Prison).

Piranesi evoked not only specific episodes of the history of ancient Rome but also specific ancient Roman places in these imaginary scenes. A metaphorical analogy of the Mamertine Prison and the *Carceri* emerges.<sup>50</sup> The famous Roman prison, called *Tullianum* in its epoch, was a temporary prison for to those sentenced to capital punishment, especially for political crimes such as treason. Gracchus, for instance, cited by Piranesi in plate II, remained incarcerated in this prison.

The Mamertine prison is a surviving subterranean construction that Piranesi’s contemporaries would have recognized. Correspondingly, Piranesi gave a subterranean feel to most of the spaces of the *Carceri* by pushing down the observer’s point of view, in an almost *di sotto in sù* perspective. Through this low angle, the perspective he depicted is that of someone looking upwards. As beholders, our gaze seeks for an exit that Piranesi supposedly located above us, reinforcing the theatrical construction.

One major Roman reference is very specific to the political and judicial system in which commoners could participate in Rome.<sup>51</sup> Occupying the place of the capital of another column, Piranesi inscribed INFAME. SCEIVSS ... RI . INFELICI . SVSPE right

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<sup>49</sup> Robinson translates *sceiuss* (*scelus*) as either wickedness or an “immoral act.” Since he did not find a quotation that referred to this word in Livy, he proposes a correspondence of *scelus* with Tullia Minor, that infamously murdered her own father to secure the Roman throne to her husband, Nero. Nonetheless, Robinson seems to ignore that *scelus* can also be translated as “crime” in Latin. Thus, *infame scelus* can be read as “infamous or ill crimes.” See Robinson and Piranesi, *Piranesi – Early Architectural Fantasies*.

<sup>50</sup> Maurizio Calvesi is one of the authors that associates the *Carceri* with the Mamertine Prison. See Calvesi, “Ideologia e Riferimenti delle ‘Carceri.’”

<sup>51</sup> The Curiate Assembly was presided by an elected Consul. It formulated laws and tried judicial cases. Plebeians (commoners) could participate of the assemblies, although they could not vote. Jonathan Scott, for instance, highlights the passage in which Tullius Hostilius describes the institution of prison in Rome and the judgement of one of the Horatii. See Scott, *Piranesi*, 55.

above a relief.<sup>52</sup> The words compose the verdict for one of the Horatii brothers for the murder of his sister. Horacius' appealed. The fair Roman law delegated the case to the people. Through this resource, the deliberation was to replace the capital penalty by a symbolic punishment. I scrutinized the reference and proposed connections with Piranesi's contemporary debates in Chapter Five.

In plate V, Piranesi created an architecture that resembles in many ways the Colosseum. The space splits into two flanks, one of each side of a moat-like feature on the building's basement. At the bottom right of the composition, on the lower level of this underground floor, successive structures of massive rectangular stones bear reliefs of lions. The configuration of this space alludes to an amphitheater's basement, such as the famous Colosseum.

Some facts help to justify Piranesi's reference to the Colosseum. First, the edifice was and still is a masterpiece of Roman architecture and engineering and carries a highly symbolic significance of Roman power and capability. Second, the reliefs of lions allude to the battles of the gladiators and other spectacles in which these animals were raised upward to the arena.

Piranesi repeatedly used references to ancient Roman artifacts like the *corvi*, fragments of equipment such as *polypastos*, and incised letters into stone, matching the visual appearance of the Roman letterings (figures 2.1 and 2.2).<sup>53</sup> The *corvus* and the

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<sup>52</sup> The complete sentence, that the circular shape of the column hides, is "Caput obnube liberatoris urbis huius; arbori infelici suspende."

<sup>53</sup> The lettering Piranesi creates for the second state of this plate is radically different. Piranesi "raised" them from the slab of stone, in an inventive fashion that does not reproduced none of the techniques of the Romans. Nonetheless, the overall appearance, including the typography, alludes to the Roman technique. See Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*; Armando Petrucci, *Public Lettering: Script, Power, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); John Sparrow, *Visible Words: A Study of Inscriptions in and as Books and Works of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).



*polypastos* are ambiguous elements in many of the illustrations. Their forms resemble, respectively, regular wooden bridges and ancient cranes.

Piranesi made a direct reference to ancient Rome through the two trophies he depicted in plate VIII. He located these very symbolic items at the bottom of both sides of a monumental double-return stair. Romans, like Piranesi, were obsessed with triumphal marches, monuments, and the symbolism that they carried. The suggestion of the *corvus*, the drawbridge that Romans used to invade enemies' warships, are characteristic of the First Punic War, which occurred between 264 and 261 BCE.

In short, Piranesi enveloped his audience in an ancient Roman environment. The classical vocabulary that Piranesi applied to the architecture is very "Roman." Arches, usually semicircular, abound. Friezes with reliefs, obelisks, commemorative columns, and fragments of columns are recurrent objects that Piranesi depicted based on his diligent antiquarian studies (see Table C.1 in the Appendix C).

## 2.3 NAUTICAL ELEMENTS AND PORTS

There is an astonishing number of nautical or correlated elements throughout the sixteen etchings of the *Carceri* (See Table C.2 in the Appendix C). Surprisingly, the scholarship on the series neglects these objects. The environment that Piranesi created for the illustrations resembles a colossal ruined port in which the water is (strangely) no longer present. Nonetheless, the tools and equipment remain there, either useless or with new purposes. The thick ropes that once tied magnificent galleys used in glorious battles now torture human figures in distressing expressions. Formerly imposing masts and sails are now abandoned to their sad fate in lugubrious places. What were once noble

beakheads are now broken, rotten pieces of wood thrown to the floor or embedded in the walls and arches. Piranesi depicted fragments of vessels throughout the illustrations as a butchered body, signaling misery and despair. These are the elements, although present in some of the first states, that Piranesi repetitively and restlessly added to the second edition of the etchings.

Depicting nautical and port elements must have been an easy task for Piranesi, especially while he was in Venice. The city, literally formed by a bunch of islands on a lagoon, is famous for its many vessels and bridges. Considering that Piranesi started producing the illustrations of the *Carceri* while in Venice circa 1745, he was surrounded by a rich repertoire of nautical elements. Interestingly, the Arsenal, the great naval factory, went through an intensive redevelopment from 1684 to 1745 in order to allow the construction of larger vessels.

In most of the etchings, Piranesi mixed the Roman references to the nautical elements in a symbiotic relationship. The nautical elements combined with the trophies of the plate VIII evokes a special kind of Roman event: the naval triumph.<sup>54</sup> Both Livy and the Greek Polybius, whom Piranesi referenced many times in his works, described this type of celebration in their histories.

The numerous fragments of ships that Piranesi depicted throughout the sixteen etchings relate to Roman naval trophies. The chronology of the first and last naval triumphs goes from the Republic to the Julio-Claudian Empire.<sup>55</sup> The first naval triumph

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<sup>54</sup> Legend has it that, in victories of naval battles, bows or beaks of defeated ships (and sometimes, whole ships) were added to traditional trophies.

<sup>55</sup> Concerning the chronology of the Roman period according to the plates of the *Carceri*, “Piranesi’s etchings extend from the despotism and brutality of Neronian imperial Rome back in time to the severe but adjudicated justice of the Roman republic.” Joseph J. Rishel and Edgar Peters Bowron, *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Merrel, 2000), 575.

ever recorded happened in 260 BCE to celebrate the victory of the commander Duilius in the First Punic War, in the regal period. The last official Roman naval triumph was held in 29 BCE to celebrate Augustus' victory in the Actian Battle, in the beginning of the Empire.<sup>56</sup>

Although ambiguous, some of the recurrent elements with which Piranesi represented ships and the like are the wooden decks, sails, and suggestive forms of either bows or sterns. In plate VIII, for instance, Piranesi depicted imprecise objects that resemble either standards of a triumphal route, flags, or the sails of a ship (figure 2.3). Another example is in plate X, in which a large platform, resembling a stern, invades the foreground. On the platform, a group of five human figures in swirled poses suggested a scene of defeat (figure 2.4). Likewise, in plate XI, Piranesi depicted in the bottom right a platform very similar to the deck of a ship, including a broken mast and sails in the shadow (figure 2.5).

Naval artifacts are the theme of one of the most mysterious illustrations of the whole series: plate IX. As a parenthesis, this plate is the simplest in terms of pictorial elements and offers very few alterations between the first and second editions. The huge wheel connects to another located in the background. The form suggests either the ribs of a hull or the wooden structure required to build a bridge.

Piranesi created a port-like spatial configuration for the *Carceri*, in which nautical elements abound through the depiction of the mooring rings, winches, cranes, and bollards and chains. These objects have a strong presence in the *Carceri*.

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<sup>56</sup> For the complete chronology of the Roman naval triumphs, their brief circumstances and significance, see Christopher J. Dart and Frederik J. Vervaet, "The Significance of the Naval Triumph in Roman History (260-29 BCE)," *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 176 (2011): 267–80.

In addition to the port elements, in plate VII, for example, Piranesi depicted a lighthouse to the right of the illustration (figure 2.6). Other similar structures, such as sentry boxes, showed up in plates III and XI (figures 2.7 and 2.8).

The comparison between the first and second editions of the plates reveals that Piranesi considerably increased the number of nautical elements in the etchings. The fact indicates his desire to make himself clearer by reinforcing these references.

## 2.5 TORTURE MACHINES

The third category of the most recurrent elements in the *Carceri* are the torture machines.<sup>57</sup> Piranesi was very successful in evoking emotions. The bleak atmosphere he created for the scenes brings up a psychological discomfort, at least, and an uncanny suggestion of suffering and hopelessness. Due to this extreme emotional load, it is not without reason that the plates fascinated so many artists and poets in the last 250 years.

The psychological torture is more powerful than the physical one. Piranesi depicted torture machines in an ambiguous fashion, usually hidden or in fragments. They are more suggestive than factual. Instead of explicit scenes of torture, Piranesi depicted the possibility of torture. Spiky elements, for example, appear in most of the plates, suggesting pain.

Piranesi depicted an active scene of torture in only two of the sixteen etchings. The first explicit torture scene occurs in plate II, in which Piranesi depicted a man inflicted by the *corda* (racking rope). The method consisted in tying and raising the victim, with the aid of pulleys and ropes, seven to ten meters from the ground. The ropes

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<sup>57</sup> See the most recurrent torture devices in the table C.3 Appendix C.

were then released “either gently or abruptly, depending on the severity of his [victim’s] tormenters.”<sup>58</sup>

The second active scene of torture appears in plate X, albeit less explicitly than in plate II. Piranesi depicted a torture method called *veglia* (enforced wakefulness).

Although unfamiliar to our contemporary eyes, I assume that the audience of the eighteenth-century recognized the method. The victim, with legs and hands tied, was seated in precarious balance on a tall pointed stool and remained in this position for eight to twelve hours. The victim usually collapsed and injured himself, but even if he did not, the position was very painful.<sup>59</sup> Piranesi depicted three fallen men and two other figures checking on them (figure 2.4). The figure to the left resembles a skeleton in a kind of *memento mori*.

Another method no longer recognizable - but that must have been easily acknowledged in the eighteenth century - is the *antenna*. The device, that appears in many plates of the *Carceri*, is the equivalent to our solitary confinement. The victim was put in a sort of cage that was raised, with the support of pulleys and ropes, and remained in isolation for the “necessary” time.<sup>60</sup>

The other references are purposely ambiguous. For example, many of the man-sized bollards can be read as a *vergine di ferro* (iron maiden). Spikes or fragments of spiky objects suggest the *schiacciamani* (hand-squeezers) or comparable torment tools. The many wheels that Piranesi depicted can also be instruments of torture or capital punishment by themselves. They were used either to bludgeon the victim to death or, as a

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<sup>58</sup> Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment*, 220.

<sup>59</sup> Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment*.

<sup>60</sup> Piranesi mentioned the *antenna* in plate *Carcere Oscura*, published for the first time in 1743 in *Prima Parte di Architettura e Prospettiva*.

torture device, to break their bones. As an instrument of torture, they are called Catherine wheel or breaking wheel.

Piranesi emphatically emphasized the psychological torture in his *Carceri d'Invenzione*. The human figures are lost and desperate in the confined architecture he created. The hostility of the space and the lack of exit suggest an inevitable and tenebrous death. People become trapped between the immense walls and infinite arches, as well as in the bridges that lead to nowhere. To Piranesi, stagnation was torture.

In these tenebrous scenarios, Piranesi conveyed his opinions on the debates of the eighteenth century. Through references to Roman architecture, Piranesi argued about taste in his contemporary Rome and the destiny of the city's ancient legacy, in danger with the philhellenes. Through the nautical elements, Piranesi criticized the harshness of the imagination of the patrons of his epoch and their choices. At last, Piranesi used the torture machines to call attention to the decadence that the Greek influence caused in Rome through the impact on its law.

## 2.6 THE REASON BEHIND THE IMAGINARY PRISONS

The reasons that compelled Piranesi to produce the illustrations of imaginary prisons and the exact circumstances surrounding their creation present many paradoxical and imprecise information. Indeed, the 1740s is a nebulous decade in Piranesi's biography. The large format of the etchings of the *Carceri* demanded a monetary investment that Piranesi likely did not have at his disposal when he first conceived the illustrations of imaginary prisons. The copperplates, base of the etching process, were

extremely expensive, as were the publication costs in general.<sup>61</sup> Due to the lack of any documental trace, it is unclear whether someone else sponsored the first prints of the imaginary prisons or not.

The question about patronage remains unanswered. Piranesi had been an unemployed young architect/artist/publisher. He had provided service to the Venetian ambassador Francesco Venier in Rome from 1740 to 1744, the duration of the diplomat's posting. Notwithstanding, during these years, Piranesi's father continued to support supporting his son financially in Rome.<sup>62</sup> The end of the paternal allowance required Piranesi's return to his native Venice in 1744.<sup>63</sup> It was around these years, circa 1745, that Piranesi started working on the illustrations of the imaginary prisons.<sup>64</sup>

Another clue for Piranesi's challenging financial situation in the 1740s are the circumstances of this final return to Rome in 1747. According to his biographers, it was possible only because of a deal between Piranesi and a Venetian printmaker, whose prints Piranesi would sell in the Eternal City. The details of the agreement are unknown. What is known is that this figure, named Giuseppe/Joseph Wagner, had a connection with Giovanni Bouchard in Rome, the *Carceri*'s first publisher.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Minor, Piranesi's Lost Words, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Angelo Piranesi's investment in his son Giovanni Battista was documented in a testament in which he asserted that he had "somministrato non poco soldo e con molto dispendio a Giambattista [suo] figlio quale al presente si attrova in Roma per renderlo capace a guadagnarsi onorevolmente il vitto e quelle fortune che le furono compartite della benedizione del cielo." See Lionello Puppi, "Educazione Veneziana di Piranesi," in *Piranesi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, ed. Alessandro Bettagno and Istituto di storia dell'arte (Fondazione "Giorgio Cini") (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1983), 299.

<sup>63</sup> Minor, Piranesi's Lost Words, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Although the exact date is unknown, scholars agree that Piranesi started working on the illustrations of the *Carceri* in the beginning or in the mid-1740s. See, for instance, Andrew Robison and Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Piranesi-Early Architectural Fantasies: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings* (Washington: Chicago: National Gallery of Art; University of Chicago Press, 1986), 81.; Mario Bevilacqua, *Piranesi: Taccuini di Modena*, Biblioteca estense (Modena, Italy) (Roma: Artemide, 2008), 271., and Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*.

<sup>65</sup> See Minor, *Lost Words*, Bevilacqua, *Taccuini di Modena*, Robinson and Piranesi, *Piranesi – Early Architectural Fantasies*, and Piranesi, Ficacci, and Lamers-Schütze, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*.

Such a scenario, depicting Piranesi as a person of modest origins, makes it questionable how his family provided the exceptional education Piranesi received in Venice. His considerably quick acceptance among the intellectual circles of Rome is equally shadowy. For instance, circa 1744, Piranesi became a member of the *Accademia degli Arcadi* in Rome, a prestigious literary society that gathered popes, cardinals, scientists, architects, poets, artists, and top intellectuals in its meetings. It is odd that an unknown outsider was able to stay in contact with some of the most important figures of Rome already in the beginning of his career, if not through a solid financial background.<sup>66</sup>

At any rate, Piranesi was established in Rome when he printed and published the first issue of the *Carceri*. The first prints had a shy debut. There is no evidence of a publication of the *Invenzioni capric.di Carceri*, on its own. Instead, it was published within the *Opere Varie* of 1749 as a “bonus” set of illustrations.<sup>67</sup> This fact gives a speculative character to the publication of the imaginary prisons. The publisher Jean/Giovanni Bouchard and perhaps even Piranesi were clearly testing the reception of the series.

An explanation for the hesitation around the *Invenzioni* is the etchings’ distinguished nature. The series constituted a work that, in comparison with the previous *Prima Parte*, showed an intense emotional charge, brought a mysterious atmosphere, and explored more deliberately a fantastic approach of architecture. In spite of some recognition that the work of Piranesi could have already gained, the imaginary prisons consisted in a brand new enterprise. In contrast to *Prima Parte* or the previous *piccole*

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<sup>66</sup> During the 1740s, Piranesi published *Prima Parte di Architettura e Prospettiva* (1743), *Vedute di Roma* (circa 1748 or earlier), *Antichità Romane de’ Tempi della Repubblica e de’ Primi Imperatori* (1748).

<sup>67</sup> Robison and Piranesi, *Piranesi--Early Architectural Fantasies*, 37.



*vedute* of Roman monuments, the illustrations of imaginary prisons were also much apart from the Grand Tour market.<sup>68</sup>

Piranesi's success escalated in the 1750s. He reaped the rewards of his *Vedute di Roma* (1748 or earlier) and *Le Antichità Romane* (1756), probably his most profitable publications. In 1761, Piranesi, already owner of a publishing company, went back to the copperplates of the imaginary prisons. He thoroughly reworked the fourteen illustrations, added two new plates, and republished the entire series with the title of *Carceri d'Invenzione*. With highly developed technical skills on etching, Piranesi's expressive achievements are remarkable. His linework is even sketchier than the first edition, reinforcing a sense of immediacy. But the most significant alterations are the addition of new references and the drastic change on the light effects, accentuating the chiaroscuro by darkening the tone of the shadows.

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<sup>68</sup> The Grand Tour was a common trip undertaken by mostly wealthy young men in order to enhance their education. Rome was one of the main destinations of the pilgrims of the Grand Tour. Oriented to this market, Piranesi had produced innumerable *vedute*, that worked such as portraits/souvenirs of Roman monuments.



Figure 2.1 Model of the *corvus* by Martin Lokaj. In: “Corvus - Livius,” accessed June 25, 2018, <http://www.livius.org/articles/concept/corvus/>.



Figure 2.2 Reconstruction of a Roman *polypastos*. In: Qualle, Deutsch: Rekonstruktion Eines Römischen Krans, Der Stadt Bonn Anlässlich Ihrer 2000-Jahr-Feier Geschenkt, May 4, 2005, May 4, 2005, Own work, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roemerkran.jpg>.



Figure 2.3 Detail of masts/flags in plate VIII.



Figure 2.4 Detail of prisoners in a ship-like platform tortured by *veglia* in plate X.



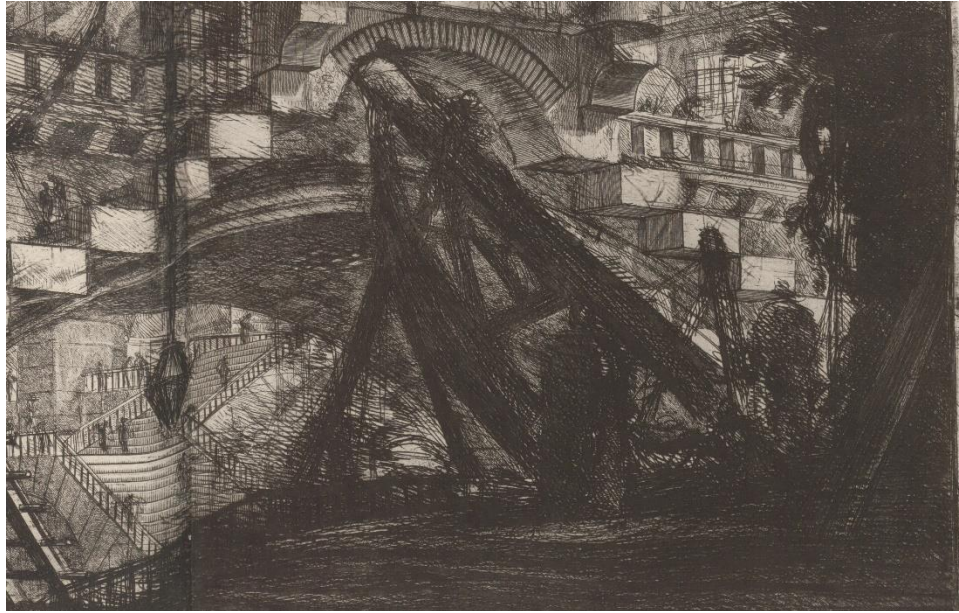


Figure 2.5 Detail of prow or stern of a ship in plate XI.



Figure 2.6 Detail of a lighthouse in plate VII.

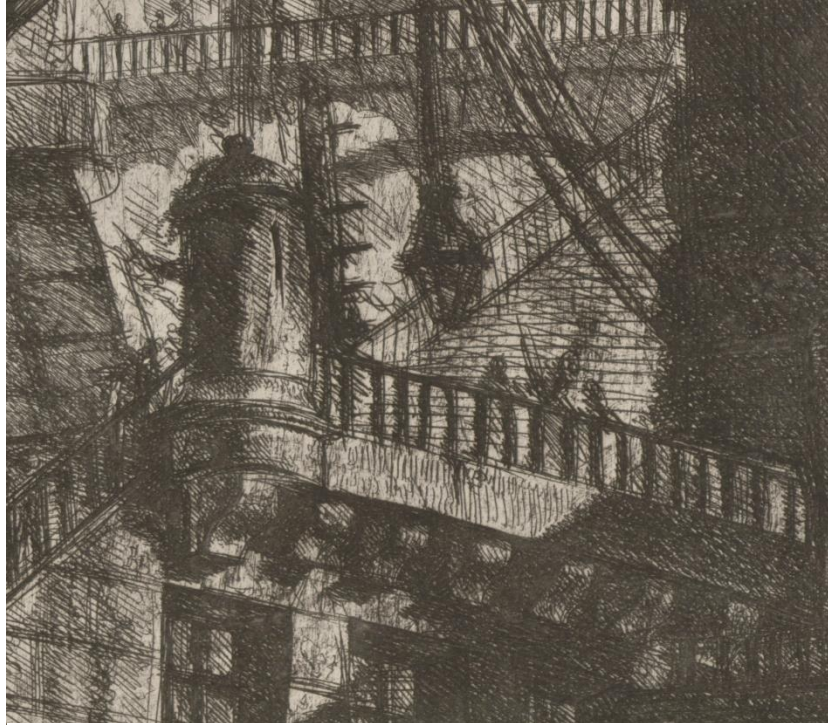


Figure 2.7 Detail of sentry boxes in plate III.



Figure 2.8. Detail of sentry boxes in plate XI.



### CHAPTER THREE ROMAN ELEMENTS

I argue that the series of illustrations of imaginary prisons was the first of the many publications that Piranesi conceived as a response to contemporary theoretical and aesthetic debates. Albeit in a subtle fashion, Piranesi expressed his convictions through the referential imagery of the *Carceri*.

The intellectual maturity of the *Carceri d'Invenzione* (1761) followed Piranesi's theoretical formulation for the *Della Magnificenza e d'Architettura de' Romani*.<sup>69</sup> Both books were published in the same year and share many arguments regarding the Greco-Roman controversy. Scholars agree that the latter book was a keen response to the many publications that popped up in the 1750s claiming the artistic and cultural production of Greece as superior, belittling the Roman heritage.<sup>70</sup> The *Carceri*, ultimately, had the exact same objective, but in reverse. If this specific subject matter was not sufficiently clear in the previous states of the *Carceri*, Piranesi's reworking for the second edition reinforced the objects he used for instilling this ideological content.

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<sup>69</sup> Piranesi, *Della magnificenza e d'Architettura de' Romani*.

<sup>70</sup> The books that Piranesi responded to were Allan Ramsay's *A Dialogue on Taste* of 1755 and David Le Roy's *Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* of 1758. See Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*.

Plate XVI, although included in the previous edition, faced a drastic alteration to persuade the audience of the *Carceri* and to promote not only good taste in architecture, but also concepts linked to morals, politics, and justice. Once more, Piranesi used the history of ancient Rome as a guiding rule for his endeavor. The comparison between the two versions of plate XVI reveals that the change is almost beyond recognition due to the number of additions and references.

In plate XVI, the grand finale of the series of the *Carceri*, Piranesi added to the second version a gravestone in the center of the composition in which he incised IMPIETATI ET MALIS ARTIBVS. There is no consensus regarding the translation of the Latin phrase, neither have scholars found any source for the quotation. Its simplest and direct translation is the best way to understand it: “impiety and bad behavior” or “impiety and bad arts.”<sup>71</sup> I consider the latter version the most adequate in that it aligns directly to the debate about taste that concerned Piranesi and the most learned men of the eighteenth-century in Europe.

*Buon gusto* (good taste) versus *cattivo gusto* (bad taste) was a mainstream debate that permeated the production of art and architecture in the *settecento*.<sup>72</sup> *Buon gusto* involved a sense of “order, discernment, discrimination, differentiation, clear disposition, coherence, hierarchy, and subordination,” whereas *cattivo gusto* (bad taste) encompassed attributes associated with baroque, such as “confusion, disorder, heterogeneity, complexity, variegation, imbroglio, and discord.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Andrew Robinson, for instance, linked the phrase to the two heads above it that, in turn, allude to the episode of Livy’s History of Rome in which Brutus beheads his two traitor sons. *Impietati et malis artibus*, for Robinson, can be read as “thus to treason and evil conduct.” See Robison and Piranesi, *Piranesi--Early Architectural Fantasies*, 50.

<sup>72</sup> Vernon Hyde Minor discusses *buon gusto* extensively in “*The Death of Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste*,” published in 2006.

<sup>73</sup> Minor, “Ideology and Interpretation in Rome’s Parrhasian Grove,” 222.

In the eighteenth-century, baroque was an aesthetic still in use not only in architecture, but also in other cultural manifestations such as literature and sculpture. However, debates over baroque were not the only intellectual quarrels. Debates involving the superiority of modern over ancient as well as Roman over Greece were also big issues. For Piranesi, the philhellenes' defense of Greece as the model for classical architecture was a sign of ignorance and bad taste.

Far beyond strict aesthetics, a moral system was imbued in the debate. Piranesi considered contemporary society to be morally and culturally decadent. What were his fellows doing with the glorious model from their own past? Who was responsible for the “impiety and bad arts” that he denounced in plate XVI? And, most importantly, if the solution was to restore the models of the past, which past was to be restored?

Piranesi attributed to architecture a fundamental social role to shape and elevate society, which explains the intensity of his involvement in the debate. For him, the architect was an important social agent that should rely on Roman precedents. As early as in *Prima Parte di Architettura e Prospettiva* (1743), Piranesi revealed an awareness of this social role in the dedication letter to his patron Nicola Giobbe.<sup>74</sup> In the dedication, Piranesi showed his frustration with the narrow-minded patronage system, proclaiming that, unable to free architecture from bad taste due to lack of commissions, his *disegni* were the only alternative at his reach.<sup>75</sup> He also criticized the weakness of the contemporary architects and their baroque language. He believed that it was necessary to “return to the ancient and to the authority of the masters of the Renaissance, and the

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<sup>74</sup> Bevilacqua, *Taccuini di Modena*, 48.

<sup>75</sup> Piranesi wrote that “altro partito non veggo restare a me, e a qualsivoglia altro Architetto moderno, che spiegare com disegni le proprie idee.” Silvia Gavuzzo-Stewart, *Nelle Carceri di G.B.Piranesi.*, 1999, 2–3.



rejection of the ‘weak’ way of the moderns (derived from Borromini, ‘very weak’).<sup>76</sup>

In Piranesi’s time, monarchy, absolutism, and baroque formed a triad that characterized the decadent *ancien régime* in Europe against which Piranesi was fighting. King Charles III of Naples represented a branch of this social and political system in Italy. With the service of the architect Luigi Vanvitelli (1700-1773) the regime was materialized in the *Reggia di Caserta*, a palace whose architecture Piranesi deemed decrepit by birth. Initiated in 1752, it took decades to deliver the “1,200-room monstrosity with façades 247 meters (810 ft) long and 36 meters (118 ft) high, built with the help of 2,861 workers, including convicts and galleys slaves.”<sup>77</sup>

Although Piranesi supposedly initially admired Vanvitelli, the two became archrivals in the subsequent decades.<sup>78</sup> Vanvitelli was one of the most successful architects of his time. If envy drove Piranesi’s resentment at the beginning of his career towards Vanvitelli, their ideological affiliations, architectural styles, and professional directions created an insurmountable gap between the two over time.<sup>79</sup> Their acerbic declarations about each other permeated their relationship. Vanvitelli, for instance, defined Piranesi as a lunatic in a letter to his brother. In the same letter, he also questioned Piranesi’s ability to undertake architectural commissions for the basilica of St.

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<sup>76</sup> “un ritorno all’antico e all’autorità dei maestri del Rinascimento, e il rifiuto della maniera ‘molle’ dei moderni (derivata da Borromini ‘così molle’).” Bevilacqua, *Taccuini di Modena*, 48.

<sup>77</sup> Gauvin A. Bailey, *Baroque & Rococo*, Art & Ideas (London; New York, N.Y: Phaidon, 2012), 23.

<sup>78</sup> Piranesi writes in his letter to Giobbe: “E qui Signore poichè de’ benefizj, che mi avette si fa menzione, non finirò questa lettera senza ricordarvi com infinito mio piacere dela amicizia che per vostro mezzo ho acquisitata delli due chiarissimi Architetti dell’età mostra Nicola Salvi, e Luigi Vanvitelli; il merito de’ quali come sarà abbastanza alla posterità comprovato delle insigni Opere cha hanno fato; e della Fontana di Trevi principalmente, che ora il primo sta per finire, e dal Porto, e Lazzaretto d’Ancona teste terminati per ora dell’altro; così vano sarebbe che io me estendessi nelle loro lodi (...)” In Cesare De Seta, p. 110-11.

<sup>79</sup> Cesare De Seta proposes an opposition relationship between Piranesi and Vanvitelli similar to that of Rubens and Rembrandt or Borromini and Bernini. See Cesare De Seta, “Vanvitelli e G. B. Piranesi,” in *Piranesi tra Venezia e l’Europa*, ed. Alessandro Bettagno and Istituto di storia dell’arte (Fondazione “Giorgio Cini”) (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1983), 103–25.

John Lateran and Santa Maria del Priorato.<sup>80</sup>

Piranesi criticized the rival's works in many plates of the *Carceri*. For instance, the analogies between Charles III's *palazzo* and the architecture of the *Carceri* are hard to ignore. The colossal magnitude of such a building matches those that Piranesi depicted in the illustrations of the *Carceri*. Moreover, the anonymous ghost-like figures peopling the vast spaces, unable to find an exit, may be read as portrayals of the slaves that worked on the construction. Even the name "prison" starts to make more sense: in a factual interpretation, it alludes to the condition of these workers; in a metaphorical sense, they represent the inability of some groups to be free of the retrograde absolutist system – and its architecture.

The secular aristocracy, however, is not the only group that Piranesi attacked in the *Carceri*. The Catholic Church, the religious aristocracy and a great patron of the arts and architecture, was also a target. The church, emulating the Roman tradition of "bread and circus," offered many public pompous festivals to commemorate a wide range of events.<sup>81</sup> In the *Carceri*, Piranesi used the imagery evoking religious festivals to criticize the Catholic Church's affiliation with the monarchy.

Among the most important festivals were the Lateran *possesso* and the annual Chinaia, both patronized by the aristocracy. The *possesso* consisted in the walk of the newly elected pope to the basilica of St. John Lateran, over which Popes traditionally presided as Bishops of Rome. Considering that Piranesi first moved to Rome in 1740, he

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<sup>80</sup> About Piranesi's work for St. John Lateran: "Invero, se faranno fare qualche fabbrica al Piranesi, si vedrà cosa puol produrre la testa di un matto, che non ha verun fondamento." Equally, about Santa Maria del Priorato, he exclaimed that Piranesi was not an architect, but an engraver: "È un fenomeno particolare che il pazzo Piranesi ardisca far l'architetto: solo dirò che non è mestiere da pazzi..." Years later, Vanvitelli reinforces that Piranesi "è unicamente intagliatore, non già architetto." See De Seta, 123.

<sup>81</sup> See Christopher M. S. Johns, "The Entrepôt of Europe: Rome in the Eighteenth Century," in *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Joseph J. Rishel and Edgar Peters Bowron (London: Merrel, 2000), 35.

may have witnessed the *possesso* of Pope Benedict XIV (papacy 1740 – 1758) and certainly witnessed the *possesso* of the Venetian Pope Clement XIII (papacy 1758 – 1769). The Duke of Parma (Farnese family) was responsible for the *possessi*, and the Kingdom of Naples, for the *Chinea*.<sup>82</sup> It is noteworthy that, in Piranesi's time, the commissioner of the Palace of Caserta, King Charles III, was behind the aesthetics of the *Chinea*.

In fact, as representations of the conjunction of the power of monarchy and the Catholic Church, the festivals reproduced the standards of taste of the two institutions. In sum, the festivals were the concrete manifestation of most of the aspects that Piranesi criticized on his time. The ephemeral monuments throughout the city incorporated and promoted the very sense of taste that Piranesi condemned.

Piranesi used the imagery of the contemporary Roman religious festivals to criticize the Church's appropriation of ancient triumphal routes.<sup>83</sup> The festivals combined ephemeral structures with fireworks and musical performances to create a strong impression on the populace. The focal point of the *possesso*, for instance, was an ephemeral triumphal arch.<sup>84</sup> Arches are foundational to the architecture of the *Carceri* and are present in all of the sixteen illustrations. The crowded top of bridges enacted triumphal marches.<sup>85</sup> In addition, the abandoned trophies Piranesi depicted in plate VIII

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<sup>82</sup> John Moore analysis in depth the presentation known as *Chinea* happened in 1759 and engraved by artists such as Giuseppe Vasi. See John E. Moore, "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome: The Case of the *Chinea*," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 43/44 (1998): 183–292, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4238761>.

<sup>83</sup> See Rishel and Bowron, *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century*; Moore, "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome."

<sup>84</sup> Giuseppe Vasi, a successful engraver that had a close relationship with Piranesi, is one of the artists that produced etchings of the *macchine*. See Johns, "The Entrepôt of Europe: Rome in the Eighteenth Century," 35. To see some of the engravings, see, for instance Johns, 35; Moore, "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome."

<sup>85</sup> See title page and plates IV, VI, and XIII.

are reminders of the ancient glorious past adapted, in his time, to serve bad taste.

Piranesi referenced the preparation of the city for the festivals through the ladders, beams, scaffolds, pulleys, and cranes he depicted throughout the etchings of the *Carceri*. The preparation for the events transformed the profile of the city, displaying a myriad of devices used to set up the structures and ornate the city. Many of the mechanical tools to lift elements such as panels and banners used for the festivities of the epoch of Piranesi, for instance, were eighteenth-century achievements in building technology developed by Nicola Zabaglia (1664-1750).<sup>86</sup> The wooden beams tied to each other spread out in plates of the *Carceri*, for instance, were references to Zabaglia's methods of joining beams. Engravings by Francesco Rostagni (b. circa 1740) show remarkable resemblances between Zabaglia's technique and Piranesi's illustrations of the beams (figure 3.1). As a parenthesis, Piranesi was indirectly needling Vanvitelli by addressing these mechanical devices: Zabaglia worked with Vanvitelli in the 1740s, providing the same mechanical devices for the restoration of Saint Peter's dome.<sup>87</sup>

Piranesi also addressed the preparation of the city for the festivals through the many cloths that tiny human figures hang on the parapets of bridges and catwalks in many of the plates (figures 3.2 – 3.7). They alluded to the textile ornamentations hung on windowsills and balconies during the festivities, such as tapestries and flags. Likewise, in plate VIII, the ambiguous pair of objects composed of pole and cloth alluded to the many flags used in the festivals (figure 2.3).

The religious festivals involved a huge industry that, in turn, offered opportunities

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<sup>86</sup> Nicoletta Marconi, "Technicians and Master Builders for the Dome of St. Peter's in Vatican in the Eighteenth Century: The Contribution of Nicola Zabaglia (1664-1750)," 2009, 10.

<sup>87</sup> Vanvitelli was designated the architect of Saint Peter's basilica between 1742 and 1747. See Rishel, Joseph J., and Edgar Peters Bowron. *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Merrel, 2000.

of work for many artists and architects.<sup>88</sup> A great apparatus was necessary to enable these events. The main feature of the China, for example, was a colossal mobile structure, called *macchina*, to which the fireworks were attached. Many engravings of the epoch, used to publicize the events, documented the *macchine* and their profusion of baroque ornamentation.

Several objects that Piranesi depicted in the *Carceri* corresponded to the *macchine* of the China. A surviving etching that recorded Paolo Posi's *macchina* for the China of 1759 shows some examples (figure 3.8).<sup>89</sup> The bollards and chains in front of the central portal of the monument are elements that Piranesi repetitively depicted in the *Carceri*. The metal leonine rings at the bottom of the *macchina* equate to those that Piranesi depicted in plate XV. Additionally, the round sentry boxes on the base of the monument are equivalent to those that Piranesi added to the second version of plate XI in 1761 (figure 2.7 and 2.8). At last, Piranesi also alluded to the magnificent fireworks typical of the China in the mysterious clouds of smoke in the *Carceri*. This awe-inspiring feature was truly a high point during the ceremonies.<sup>90</sup> In the *Carceri*, the clouds of smoke appear explicitly in plates VI, VII, X, and XI, not to mention the cloudy skies that might represent the fireworks' effects on the plates IV and IX.

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<sup>88</sup> Moore, "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome."

<sup>89</sup> Interestingly, the etching was produced by Piranesi's close acquaintance Giuseppe Vasi (1710-1782). Some scholars consider the relationship between Piranesi and Vasi of student-instructor. Some authors even advocate for a complicated relationship in which Piranesi would have threatened his teacher. The fact is that, be it as a partnership or as a student-instructor (perhaps both), they worked together in the early years of Piranesi's career in Rome. See, for instance, Myra Nan Rosenfeld, "Picturesque to Sublime: Piranesi's Stylistic and Technical Development from 1740 to 1761" in *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes*. Vol. 4, The Serpent and the Stylus: Essays on G. B. Piranesi (2006): 55-91.

<sup>90</sup> Moore, "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome," 258.

### 3.1 THE PATRONAGE SYSTEM

Before Piranesi started benefitting from the papal parochialism for commissions of artists and architects, he was a huge critic of the patronage system.<sup>91</sup> I claim that, in the *Carceri*, he clearly represented his disapproval not only of the taste of the patrons, but also of their choices of architects. In a caricatural tone, Piranesi made a critical summary of the attitudes of architects and patrons of the eighteenth century through the representation of the tiny human figures.

The small figures act like anonymous caricatures of Piranesi's professional allies and adversaries in five typologies. In the first group are people of good taste, agonizing over the decaying architectural, artistic, cultural, and political scene. They show apprehension and anguish, trying to leave Piranesi's hellish spaces at any cost (figure 3.9). These people are led by a small group that seems to know where to find the exit, and avidly gestures indicating the way (figures 3.10 and 3.11). Piranesi and his partisans are among the latter group, guiding the ones that seek for change and improvement of the architecture, the arts, and the society. Defeated and exhausted human figures constitute the third typology (figure 3.12).

While some of the figures in the *Carceri* are aware of the situation and desperately try to escape, others remain completely indifferent to the circumstances, and even walk downstairs, tracking the opposite direction of "common sense" (figure 3.13). By contrast to the first three typologies, they ignore their own limitations. This state of stagnation is a distinct criticism of Piranesi to some of his fellow architects. He comprised in this group his adversaries, the architects and artist of the *barocchetto*, the

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<sup>91</sup> When the Venetian Rezzonico became pope, Piranesi finally was commissioned for important works. See Rishel and Bowron, *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century*.

people of bad taste that ignore the wonders of the world above them. At last, there are those that seem to admire the architecture (figure 3.14). These are the narrow-minded patrons, the commissioners of the bad architecture.

The circumstances at the beginning of Piranesi's career justified his frustration. The mid 1740s, when he first conceived the idea for the *Carceri*, was a bitter phase of Piranesi's professional life. In the aforementioned dedication letter to Nicola Giobbe, Piranesi aggressively deplored the unfair patronage system in Rome.<sup>92</sup> He had failed in the attempt to establish himself in Rome and, probably in May of 1744, had to go back to his hometown. In the following months, Piranesi tried once more to settle in Rome, working in anonymous engravings on behalf of Carlo Nolli (1724 – 1770), but had to go back to Venice again in the mid of 1745.<sup>93</sup> After devoting himself on minor architectural and interior decoration works in Venice, Piranesi finally had the chance to go back to Rome to sell Giuseppe Wagner's etchings in the Eternal City in 1747.<sup>94</sup> It was his final move to the Papal States.

Piranesi's allusion to religious festivals in the *Carceri* had a stronger personal justification. From Venice, Piranesi tried once more to tie connections with Rome by sending a *disegno* of a *macchina* for one of the many religious festivals, but it was apparently not accepted.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the pomp of the festivals must have greatly impressed Piranesi, whose Venetian mindset was founded in the concept of collective moderation and humbleness, or *mediocritas*.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> De Seta, "Vanvitelli e G. B. Piranesi," 111.

<sup>93</sup> Bevilacqua, *Taccuini di Modena*, 271.

<sup>94</sup> Bevilacqua, 271.

<sup>95</sup> The festival celebrated the canonization of M. Saly in 1746. The drawing integrates the collection of the *Musée des Beaux-Arts* of Quimper, France). See Bevilacqua, 271.

<sup>96</sup> Loren W. Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Venice 1400-1600* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 295.

In this stage of his career, Piranesi's close alignment with the Vatican librarian and intellectual Giovanni Gaetano Bottari (1689-1775), especially in the 1740s and 1750s, had a definite role in the production of the illustrations of the *Carceri*. Bottari always recognized Piranesi's talent and tried to help him to assure commissions in many documented occasions.<sup>97</sup> In turn, be it for genuine alignment or interest in the benefits that Bottari could potentially provide, Piranesi embraced the librarian's ideologies. Among the targets of Bottari's attacks, were architects of the *barocchetto* such as Ferdinando Fuga (1699 – 1782) and Luigi Vanvitelli.<sup>98</sup>

Paradoxically, it was in the prisons that Piranesi was free to criticize whatever he desired. Protected by the ambiguity of his forms, Piranesi did not bite his tongue in the *Carceri*. The connections I proposed between the references he used in the illustrations of the imaginary prisons and Piranesi's context make his inclinations towards taste, architecture, and patronage explicit.

Many of these references are already present in the “anonymous” *Invenzioni capric. di Carceri* (1749-50). Unfortunately, its reception is a nebulous topic about which scholars have different opinions.<sup>99</sup> The lack of a scandalous repercussion, however,

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<sup>97</sup> See, for instance, Bottari's role in the rejected design for a plate in Charles III's commemorative book for the birth of his son in Heather Hyde Minor, “Rejecting Piranesi,” *The Burlington Magazine* 143, no. 1180 (2001): 412–19.

<sup>98</sup> Bottari had harshly criticized Vanvitelli's design, for instance, on the reform of the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, as well as Nicola Salvi's Fontana di Trevi. Bevilacqua, *Taccuini di Modena*.

<sup>99</sup> The nature of the imaginary prisons was clearly not compatible with the interests of the *Grand Tour*, one of Piranesi's biggest markets. Likewise, the imaginary prisons did not offer historical and archaeological interest, like *Antichità Romane* and other similar publications. Among the scarce evidence of the reception, the prices of the etchings are a surviving clue to help us to situate the *Carceri* within Piranesi's oeuvre. The plates of imaginary prisons were 40% cheaper than those of the *Vedute di Roma*, for instance. See a brief explanation of the different opinion of scholars in Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Malcolm Campbell, *Piranesi: The Dark Prisons: An Edition of the Carceri d' Invenzione from the Collection of The Arthur Ross Foundation*, exh. cat., The Italian Cultural Institute (New York: The Foundation, 1988), 23; See also Robin Middleton, “Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778),” ed. Carlo Bertelli et al., *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 41, no. 4 (1982): 333–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/989805>.



demonstrates that the criticisms of Piranesi were not completely understood.

Piranesi realized that he could harshly condemn the great patrons of his time, abominate the work of his adversaries, and ridicule colleagues in the *Carceri*. I assume that this fact explains his return to the etchings and their reprint for the second edition in 1761: as the lack of a scandalous reception of the first edition demonstrated, the prisons were a safe place in which he was absolutely free.

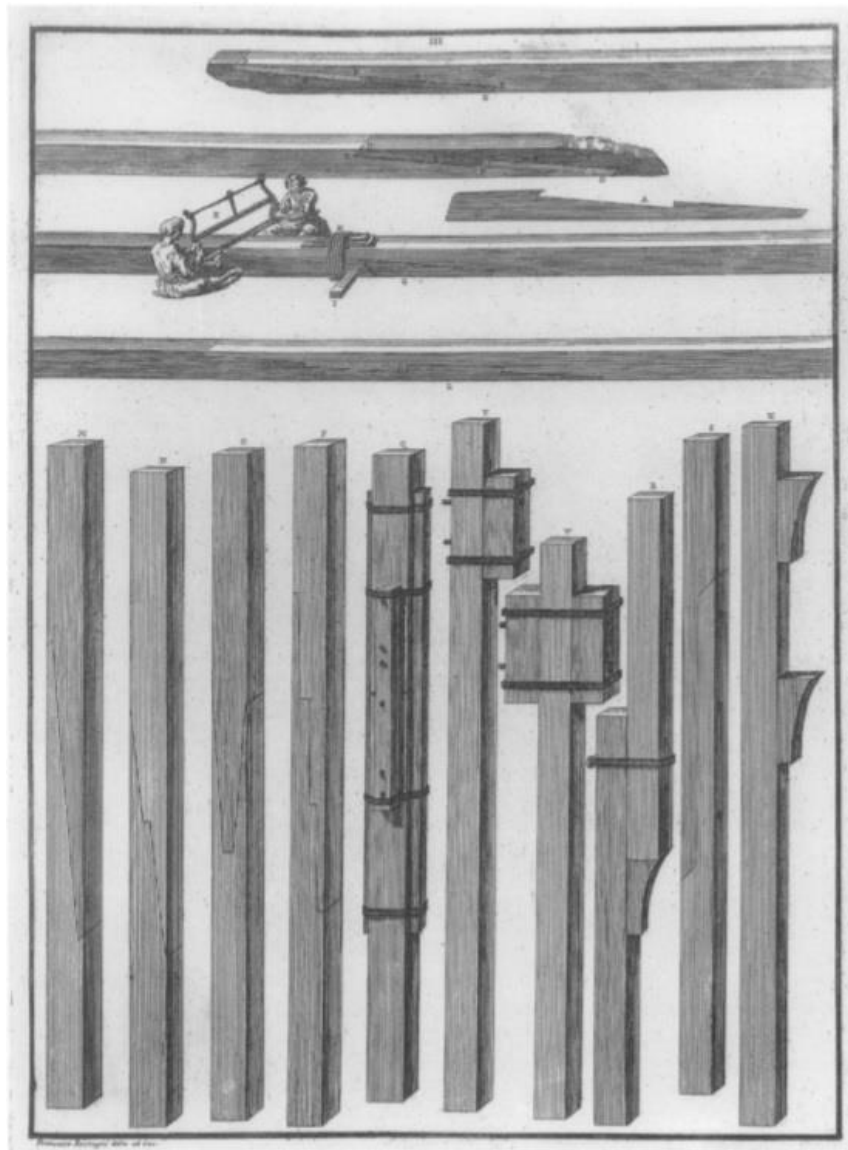


Figure 3.1 Methods of joining beams, engraving by Francesco Rostagni from Zabaglia. From: Moore, John E. "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome: The Case of the China." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 43/44 (1998): 183–292. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4238761>, figure 16.

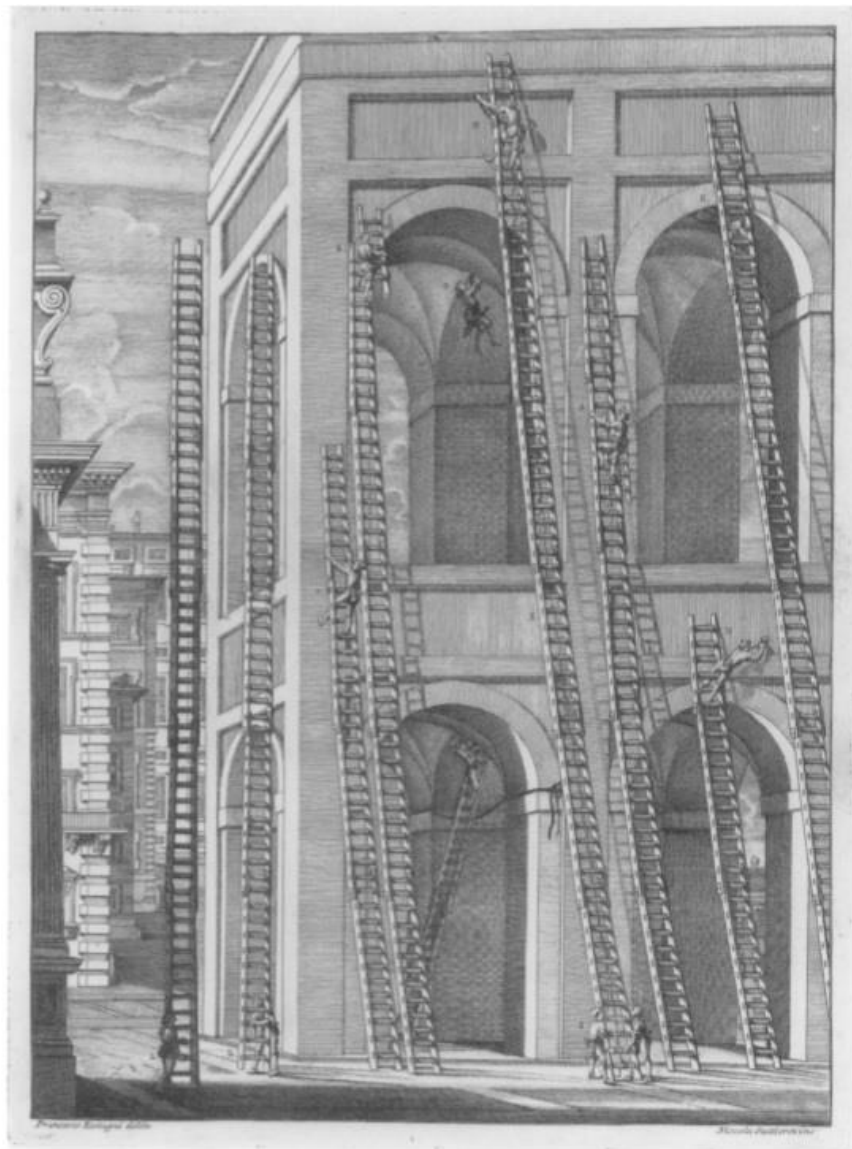


Figure 3.2 Festival-hangers working on ladders, engraving by Niccola Gutierrez (after Rostagni) from Zabaglia. From: Moore, John E. "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome: The Case of the China." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 43/44 (1998): 183–292. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4238761>, figure 24.

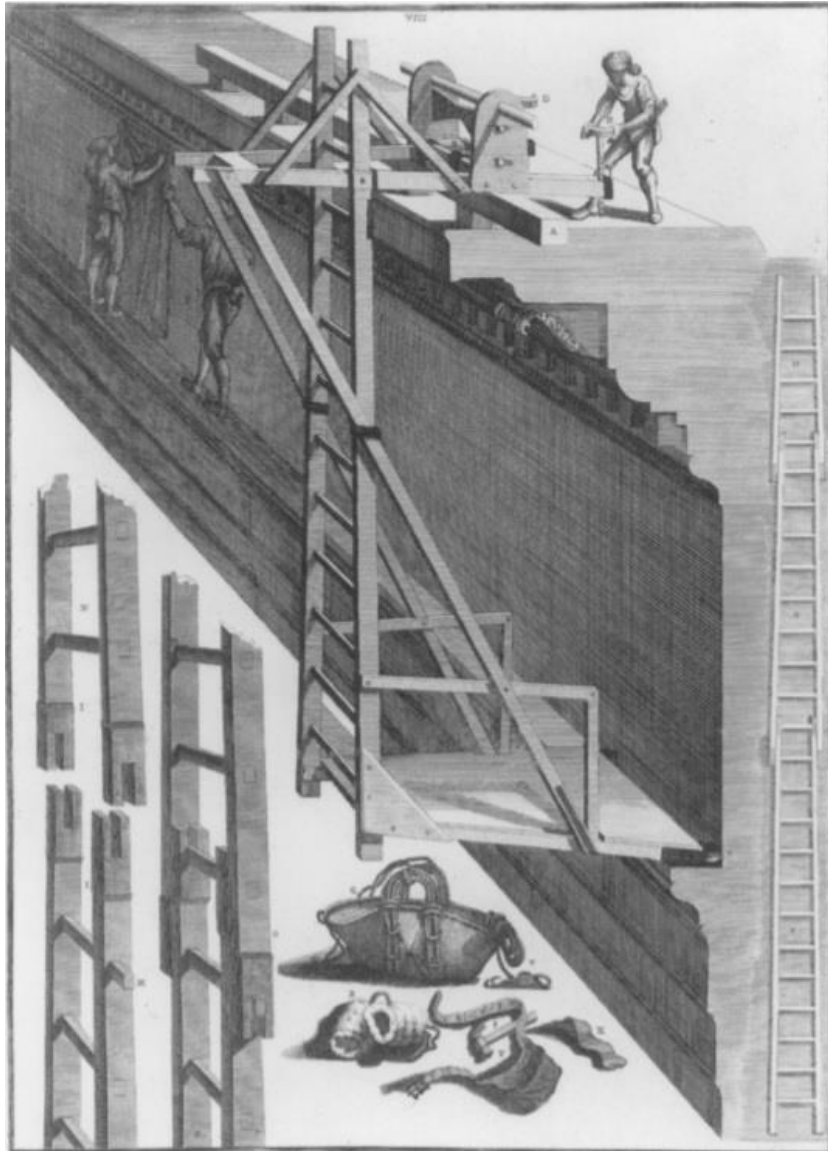


Figure 3.3 Festival-hangers applying cloth decoration to a frieze, engraving from Zabaglia. From: Moore, John E. "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome: The Case of the China." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 43/44 (1998): 183–292. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4238761>, figure 11.



Figure 3.4 Cavalcade for the first presentation of the China, engraving by Giuseppe Vasi (1756). From: Moore, John E. "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome: The Case of the China." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 43/44 (1998): 183–292. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4238761>, figure 8.



Figure 3.5 Detail of cloth in title page.



Figure 3.6 Detail of cloth in plate III.





Figure 3.7 Detail of cloth in plate XV.

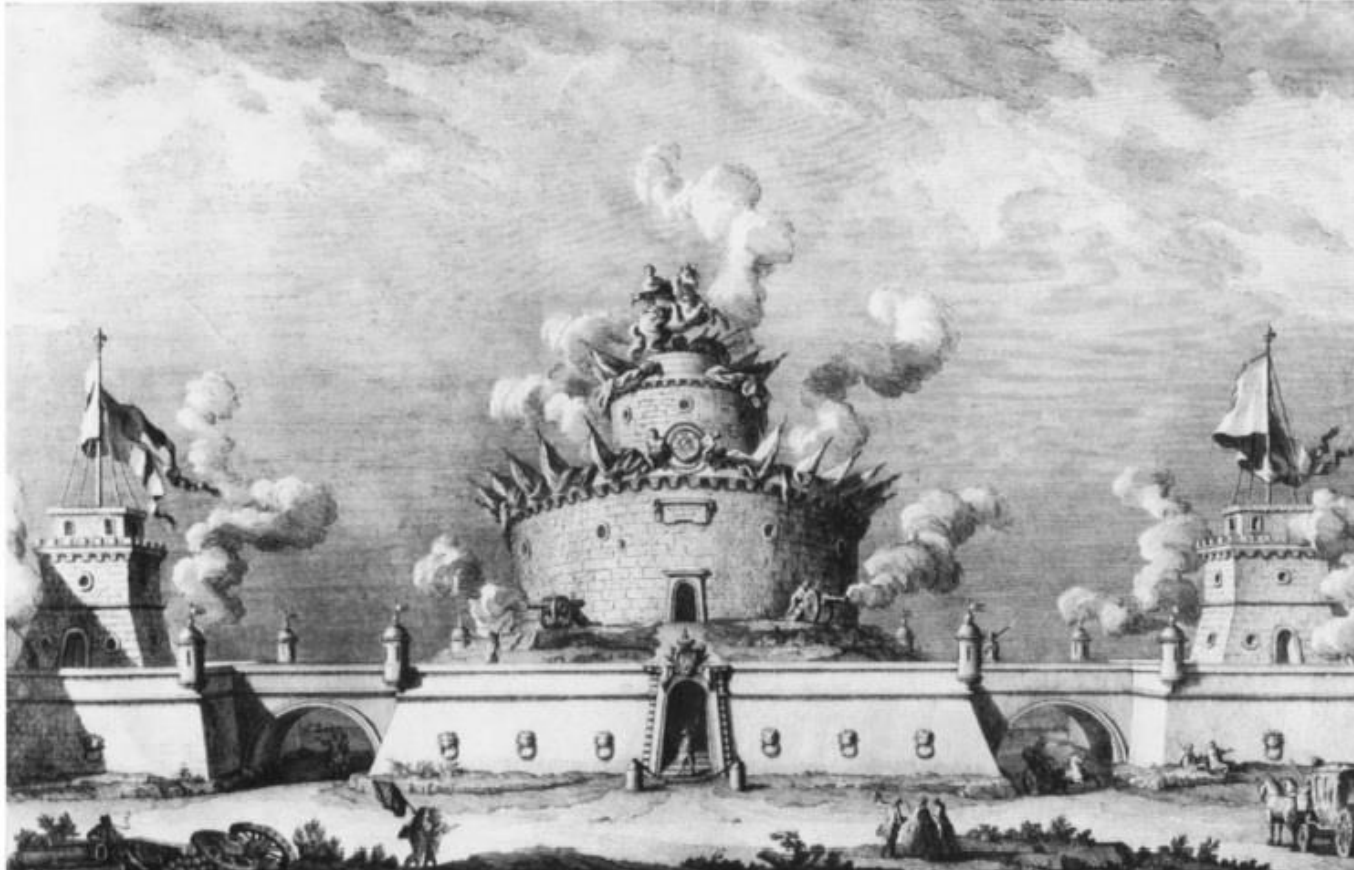


Figure 3.8 Second set piece for the China of 1759, engraving by Giuseppe Vasi. From: Moore, John E. "Building Set Pieces in Eighteenth-Century Rome: The Case of the China." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 43/44 (1998): 183–292. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4238761>, figure 2.





Figure 3.9 Detail of desperate human figures in plate II.



Figure 3.10 Detail of human figures possibly pointing to an exit in plate II.



Figure 3.11 Detail of human figures leading others in plate II.





Figure 3.12 Detail of defeated and hopeless human figures in plate VIII.



Figure 3.13 Detail of human figures walking downstairs in plate VII.

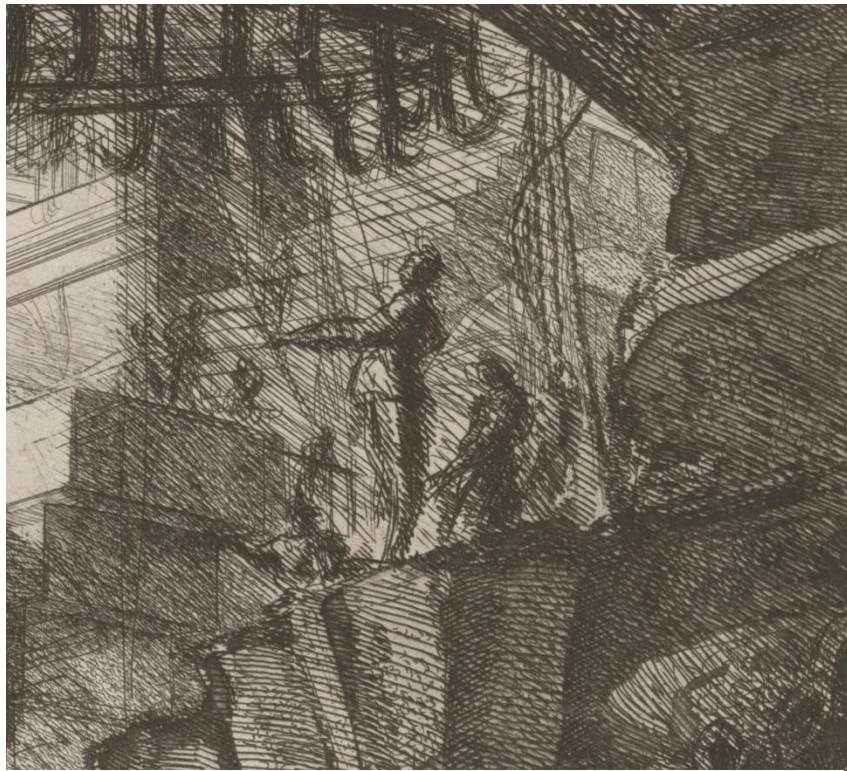


Figure 3.14 Detail of human figures admiring the architecture in plate XIII.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### BRIDGES, PORTS AND NAUTICAL ELEMENTS

I argue that the many nautical elements that Piranesi depicted in the *Carceri* derived from the visual repertoire that he collected in his home country of the Serene Republic Venice and the theoretical and philosophical associations that tied Piranesi to that place. It was in Venice that Piranesi received an architectural, artistic, and classical education instilled with the solid theoretical content that shaped the *Carceri*. The set of imaginary prisons is the most “Venetian” of Piranesi’s works, including his pictorial qualities and motifs.<sup>100</sup>

Most of the illustrations of the *Carceri* resemble colossal port complexes, fact surprisingly overlooked by the scholarship of the *Carceri*. In these spaces, Piranesi combined different platforms, sentry boxes, lanterns, bollards and mooring rings with vestiges of ships, contributing to the perception of the spaces as abandoned, decommissioned ports. Although ambiguous, the fragments of ships that Piranesi scattered throughout the illustrations work subtly to conjure up the suggestion of ports on the beholders’ subconscious.

Piranesi was most likely in Venice, not Rome, when he began working on the illustrations of the imaginary prisons circa 1745. It was among the Venetian gondolas,

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<sup>100</sup> The Venetian quality of the pictorial approach of the *Carceri* was explored, for instance, by Andrew Robinson, John Wilton-Ely, and Luigi Ficacci. See also Jaynie Anderson, “Piranesi in Tiepolo’s Venetian Studio,” in *The Piranesi Effect*, ed. Kerriane Stone and Gerard Vaughan (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2015), 59–78.

bridges, and nautical equipment that the *Carceri* was born. In what better place could Piranesi be to depict galleys, ports, and navigation tools? In which city are these elements more present in everyday life than in Venice? Where could one artist keep up with the construction of ships more closely if not in the Venetian Arsenal?

A huge expansion of the Arsenal, initiated in 1684, inspired the nautical vocabulary that appeared in the *Carceri*. The many cranes and scaffold-like objects have roots in these everyday machinery and material loading movement that Piranesi continuously witnessed from a very young age in his hometown. As in every other demolition and reconstruction work, it is also possible that interesting old artifacts and antiquities had emerged during the naval factory's reform, enticing Piranesi's antiquarian, archeological, and historical curiosity.

Beyond the formal aspects, the *Carceri* brings up an imagery rooted in Piranesi's Venetian education. The intellectual circles that integrated Piranesi's education were determinant in his career and, specifically, to the ideas that he conveyed in the *Carceri*. Aware and proud of the Venetian philosophical and ideological heritage, Piranesi signed his works until the end of his life as "Venetian architect." The frontispiece of the *Carceri d'Invenzione* (1761) is one example in which he publicized this distinction. The complete title is "*Carceri d'Invenzione di G. Battista Piranesi **archit. vene*** (my emphasis)" (figure 4.1).

The Greco-Roman controversy, to which Piranesi took part as a personal matter throughout his life, came to him in his early Venetian education. Equally, the heated discussion about the origins of the Italic civilization, a deployment of the duel between

romanophiles and philhellenes, has roots in the intellectual circles that Piranesi frequented in Venice.

My assumption is that the *Carceri* is the first in a considerable sequence of publications in which Piranesi sought to demonstrate the superiority of Rome over Greece. The theoretical and philosophical content concerning this debate is, ultimately, the most important contribution of Venice to the *Carceri* and to Piranesi's subsequent works.

The theory of the origin of the Romans in the Etruscans, postulated by Giambattista Vico (1668 – 1744), came to Piranesi via the architectural school of Carlo Lodoli (1690 – 1761) in Venice.<sup>101</sup> Despite the disagreement between Lodoli and Piranesi regarding the use of ornament, Lodoli had a definite role in introducing Piranesi to Vico's thought. In this sense, he greatly favored the Romans in the Greco-Roman controversy by embracing the ideas of the Neapolitan Vico.<sup>102</sup>

Vico's ideas are essential to understanding the *Carceri*.<sup>103</sup> The alternative root of Romans in the Etruscans instead of Greeks, published in *Scienza Nuova* (1730), "proved"

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<sup>101</sup> Piranesi most likely attended Lodoli's respected philosophical and architectural school. See Gian Paolo Consoli, "Architecture and History: Vico, Lodoli, Piranesi," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 4 (2006): 195–210; Louis Cellauro, "New Evidence on Piranesi's Circle in Venice and Rome: The Ambassador Francesco Venier and Carlo Lodoli," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 55 (2010): 279–93. For more information about the contribution of Carlo Lodoli and his school of architecture, see Neveu, "Architectural Lessons of Carlo Lodoli."

<sup>102</sup> It was Lodoli that incorporated Vico's ideas into architectural theory. See, for instance, Rykwert, *The First Moderns*. Cellauro proposes an additional link between Piranesi and Lodoli via Francesco Venier, eventual patron of Piranesi and friend of Lodoli. See Cellauro, "New Evidence on Piranesi's Circle in Venice and Rome."

<sup>103</sup> Vico left a prolific set of writings, but his epistemological inquiries are the ones that impacted Piranesi the most. Language and law are, according to Vico, the core foundation of society, and they were, together with poems and art, the very material of historical study. See Rykwert, *The First Moderns*; Naginski, "Preliminary Thoughts on Piranesi and Vico."

the autonomy of Rome from Greece.<sup>104</sup> It is noteworthy to take into account that the third edition of *Scienza Nuova*, much enlarged and completely revised, was published in 1744, a year before the assumed beginning of the imaginary prisons' illustrations.<sup>105</sup>

In the *Carceri*, Piranesi evoked an imagery related to the Etruscan seafaring nature to refer to the lineage of the Roman civilization. The Etruscans, called “pirates” by the Greeks, were exceptional sailors and created a rich repertoire of ornaments derived from the forms of the shells.<sup>106</sup> Piranesi expanded the Etruscan repertoire of nautical elements in the broken ships, sails, masts, and wheels that he depicted in the *Carceri* to evoke this civilization, key to prove the Roman autonomy.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, Vico promoted the importance of emotions for knowledge acquisition, evoked by fantasy and imagination.<sup>108</sup> Needless to say, the association of this concept with the *Carceri* is direct, immediate, and profound, in that the illustrations are entirely built on metaphorical presumptions.

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<sup>104</sup> The theory of Vico postulated that the “true stone architecture” remotely descended from a lineage that comes from the East and follows to Egyptians and then Etruscans, which means the exclusion of Greece on the formation of the Romans. See Joseph Rykwert, *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1980). See also Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*; Louis Cellauro, “New Evidence on Piranesi's Circle in Venice and Rome: The Ambassador Francesco Venier and Carlo Lodoli,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 55 (2010): 279–93 and Consoli, “Architecture and History.”

<sup>105</sup> The complete title of this publication is *Principi di Scienza Nuova d'intorno alla Comune Natura delle Nazioni* (Principles of a New Science Concerning the Common Nature of the Nations). Carlo Lodoli tried to persuade Vico to print the second edition of *Scienza Nuova* in Venice. Although unsuccessful due to issues between Vico and the potential publisher, it shows the degree of Lodoli's admiration for Vico. See Naginski, “Preliminary Thoughts on Piranesi and Vico,” 156; Rykwert, *The First Moderns*, 282.

<sup>106</sup> Piranesi benefitted from the “shell mania” of the eighteenth-century (similar to the seventeenth-century “tulip” mania) to promote the Etruscan decorative arts in the posterior *Diverse Maniere d'Adornare i Cammini* (1769), which demonstrates the permanence of Vico's ideas in Piranesi's body of work. See Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*, 165.

<sup>107</sup> Piranesi promoted, once more, the idea of the lineage of the Etruscans as a proof of the independence of the Romans from Greek cultural manifestations in 1769 with the publication of *Diverse Maniere d'adornare i Cammini*. In this book, Piranesi celebrated shells and its forms on the ornaments of the Etruscans. See Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*.

<sup>108</sup> Long, “The Piranesi Effect.”



#### 4.1 THE MAGNIFICENCE OF ROMAN ENGINEERING

The promotion of the magnificence of Roman engineering in the *Carceri* is part of a large argument that claims the superiority of Rome. Piranesi's fascination for construction technology is also "Venetian." It was in Venice that the son of the stonemason started studying architecture, likely with the guidance of his maternal uncle Matteo Lucchesi. It was also through his uncle, engineer for the Water Magistrate, that Piranesi established an important network with the technicians of the Venetian Water Authority.<sup>109</sup> Lucchesi worked extensively in the Venetian *murazzi*, the Istrian stone walls that protect the island from the waters of the lagoon.<sup>110</sup> Piranesi had accompanied many hydrological assessments in their company while in his hometown, and could have participated, even if as a mere observer, in the works for the Arsenal.<sup>111</sup>

I propose that the imagery of plate IX, the most enigmatic of the whole series, is the combination of Piranesi's firsthand experience with naval artifacts in Venice, his fascination with construction technology, and his desire to promote the magnificence of ancient Rome.<sup>112</sup> The references to ancient Rome, explored in the previous chapter, extended to Roman naval achievements, of which I highlight the most symbolic elements: the naval trophies and the *naumachiae*.

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<sup>109</sup> Antonio Foscari, "Giambattista Piranesi da Venezia al Campidoglio," in *Piranesi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, ed. Alessandro Bettagno and Istituto di storia dell'arte (Fondazione "Giorgio Cini") (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1983), 269–92.

<sup>110</sup> Piranesi, Ficacci, and Lamers-Schütze, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, 13.

<sup>111</sup> For Piranesi's connection with Venetian technicians, see Foscari, "Da Venezia al Campidoglio."

<sup>112</sup> Piranesi showed great interest in the construction technology, for example, in the almost simultaneous publication of 1748 (one year before the first edition of the *Carceri*) *Antichità Romane de' Tempi della Repubblica e de' Primi Imperatori*, in which he dissected the Roman architecture, its methods and techniques of construction, including bridges, aqueducts, baths, and sewers systems. He also devoted to the theme in *Della Magnificenza e d'Architettura de' Romani* of 1761.

In plate IX, Piranesi alluded to both. The colossal wheels that cover more than half of the illustration composed the hull of a large ship, destroyed and abandoned just like so many others throughout the *Carceri*. Disposed at the top of a stone portal, the hull still carried fragments of the beams that once supported the ship's decks. Following the motif of the trophies of the previous plate, Piranesi depicted the fragments of the enormous hull as a colossal naval trophy.<sup>113</sup>

Piranesi emphasized the magnificence of Roman engineering and architecture by using the fragments of ships as the reminiscences of a *naumachia*. These theatrical spectacles emulating historical or mythological naval battles were enacted either for entertainment or for triumphal purposes in ancient Rome.<sup>114</sup> The stage set for the *naumachiae* was a very complex and grandiose flooded structure whose idea is, at least, extravagant. Even by contemporary standards, the degree of technical effort required to make an “artificial” giant pool to reenact naval battles is enormous. It encompassed complex systems of aqueducts and sewers to bring the water in, flood the area, and drain the water. Indisputably, the *naumachiae* demonstrated the technical capability of a sophisticated society.

Piranesi was obsessed with promoting the extraordinary degree of development of the Roman construction technology, especially before Greek influence. With the scale of the ambiguous wheels in plate IX, Piranesi also alluded to a wooden structure for the

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<sup>113</sup> It was believed that during naval triumphs, beaks, prows and other equipment from the enemies' ships were displayed along with the traditional trophies.

<sup>114</sup> The first documentation of a *naumachia* dates to 46 BCE and was part of the triumphs of Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE). The last was held in 29 BCE, in the principate of Augustus. See, for instance, K. M. Coleman, “Launching into History: Aquatic Displays in the Early Empire,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 48–74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/300978>; Dart and Vervaeke, “The Significance of the Naval Triumph in Roman History (260-29 BCE).”, and Christopher Connery, “Sea Power,” *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (2010): 685–92.

construction of a bridge, an aqueduct, or a sewer. These were among the architectural and engineering Roman achievements that fascinated Piranesi the most.

Piranesi lent the concept of magnificence from Livy. In *Ab urbe condita*, Livy had already claimed the *romana magnificentia* through the examples of the temple of Capitoline Jupiter, the Circus Maximus, and the Cloaca Maxima, built as early as sixth-century BCE. This was a robust argument that Piranesi borrowed from Livy and employed in many publications. Additionally, Piranesi had the opportunity to witness the discovery of an underground section of the Cloaca in 1742 in Rome. The remains must have greatly impacted the young Piranesi. In *Della Magnificenza*, Piranesi included an etching registering his own observations of the Cloaca (figure 4.2).<sup>115</sup>

One piece of evidence of Piranesi's expertise on the construction of bridges, for instance, was the assistance he provided to Robert Mylne for the construction of the Blackfriars Bridge in London. Piranesi was equipped with both the archeological knowledge on the Roman structures and the modern experience on the Venetian water system. In this enterprise, he not only worked as a consultant but also engraved the bridge's construction in progress in 1764. [fig 101, p. 61] The engraving bears little resemblance with the actual English bridge but is astonishingly similar to the forms Piranesi depicted in plate IX of the *Carceri* (figure 4.3).

Piranesi used an element that I identified as a *corvus*, a sort of assault bridge, as one more symbol for Roman naval achievements. *Corvi* or similar elements

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<sup>115</sup> For the significance of the Cloaca Maxima for Piranesi's argument on the Greco-Roman controversy, see Susanna Pasquali and Oona M. Smyth, "Piranesi Architect, Courtier, and Antiquarian: The Late Rezzonico Years (1762-1768)," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 4 (2006): 184–87.

(drawbridges, catwalks, etc) appear in ten of the sixteen plates.<sup>116</sup> Romans invented the *corvus* during the First Punic War (264-241 BCE) to compensate for their lack of experience in naval battles. With the *corvi*, Roman soldiers could physically invade their enemies' ships by tossing the device from their ships, creating a "bridge." With this reference, Piranesi also set a specific time in Roman history: after this war, Rome "had become the unchallenged mistress of the Western Mediterranean," conquering the acknowledgement of Greece. Greek cities, attacked by other states, recognized the naval power of Rome and asked for Roman intervention in their territories.<sup>117</sup> Greece was clearly subordinated to Roman power at that time.

Bridges are also a metaphor for Piranesi's connection with both Venice and the Roman past. Plate IX is not the only reference to bridges that Piranesi did in the *Carceri*: Piranesi depicted bridges, *corvi*, or bridge-like structures in all the sixteen plates of the *Carceri*. Correspondingly, Piranesi's many blocked and useless bridges, disposed in an environment that does not offer escape, demonstrated the discontinuation between the minds of his time with the glorious Roman heritage.

In Piranesi's *Carceri*, there are many bridges, but none of them can serve as a triumphal route. There is no victory in bad taste to be celebrated. Bad taste deteriorated architecture as well as prevented the ethics to ascend. The "human insects" that people Piranesi's infinite spaces are unable to perceive the wonders of the world above the moral and intellectual prison in which they are trapped.

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<sup>116</sup> *Corvi* or similar appear in the first edition of 1749-50 in the title-page and plates III, VII, VIII, X, and in the second edition of 1761 in plates IV, VI, XIV, XV, and XVI.

<sup>117</sup> Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 4.

## 4.2 PIRANESI, BAD TASTE, AND RESENTMENT

I propose that Piranesi used the nautical elements and the hostility of the spaces of the *Carceri* to satirize the parochialism of the patronage system in Rome and the contemporary cultural scene of the city. The illustrations and, in particular, the first edition *Invenzioni capric. di Carceri* (1749-50), are evidence of the dramatic, perhaps traumatic, first impressions that the Eternal City imprinted in Piranesi during the first years of the 1740s. His transformative encounter with Rome in 1740 and, due to lack of commissions, subsequent unwilling return to Venice in 1744, were decisive events that put Piranesi at a professional crossroads.<sup>118</sup> The mind of the young artist was bubbling up after his experiences in Rome. It is noteworthy to highlight that Venice's lack of ancient Roman antiquities produced a deep impact in the city's sense of proud. "Venice was the only major Italian city that lacked the prestige of having been founded by the ancient Romans," states Loren Partridge.<sup>119</sup> The Roman ruins must have imprinted a huge impression on the Venetian admirer of Romans. Piranesi had not only talked to the Roman "speaking ruins" but also with some of the most brilliant minds of the eighteenth-century.<sup>120</sup> After all these events, his return to Venice was, ultimately, a painful defeat that Piranesi did not let lie.

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<sup>118</sup> Mario Bevilacqua and Heather Hyde Minor, "The Young Piranesi: The Itineraries of His Formation," trans. Peter Glendening, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 4 (2006): 13–53.

<sup>119</sup> Loren W. Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Venice 1400-1600* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 6.

<sup>120</sup> About his encounter with Rome, Piranesi wrote to Nicola Giobbe "io vi dirò solamente, che di tali immagini mi hanno riempito lo spirito questi **parlanti ruine**, che di simili non arrivai a potermene mai formare sopra i disegni, benchè acuratissimi, che di queste stesse ha fatto l'immortale Palladio." (I will tell you only that **speaking ruins** have filled my spirit with images that accurate drawings could never have succeeded in conveying, even those very accurate by the immortal Palladio) (my emphasis). Silvia Gavuzzo-Stewart, *Nelle Carceri di G. B. Piranesi*, 58.

In the colossal ports of the *Carceri*, the water is absent. In the matter of fact, the environment is not only dry but completely barren. There is not even the most remote sign of life besides the tiny phantasmagoric human figures. No hint of any kind of vegetation, nor fungi, nor even lichen: nothing flourishes in the hostile atmosphere that Piranesi created. The dryness of the spaces reflected, in a provocative way, Piranesi's apprehension about the lack of imagination of the cultural rulers in promoting the arts, the architecture, and the ethics. For Piranesi, the well of the imagination of the eighteenth-century was dry.

Ports, nonetheless, represented not only a familiar environment that connected Piranesi to Venice or a metaphor for the Roman cultural scene of the eighteenth-century. They were also a channel to release his jealousy for the rival architect Luigi Vanvitelli. In contrast to the professional failures of Piranesi in Rome, Vanvitelli was already a successful architect in the 1740s. While Piranesi was grieving his return to Venice, Vanvitelli had designed the Lazaretto and a new wharf for the port of Ancona at pope Clement XII's behest. The Lazaretto was finished in 1738, although the wharf took a little longer, and was finished in 1781. The *raison d'être* of the conflict between Piranesi and Vanvitelli concerned less stylistic or ideological choices than Piranesi's envy. The patronage system largely favored Vanvitelli, the son of an acknowledged artist with important contacts. In addition, the influence of Piranesi's close friend Bottari and his sharp criticism on Vanvitelli was, as already mentioned, another reason for the enmity.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> In 1754, for instance, Bottari straightforwardly criticizes many works of Vanvitelli, especially the reform of Saint Peter's dome and the Port of Ancona, in the publication *Dialogo sopra le tre arti del disegno*. Vanvitelli responded "Parla dela Cupola di San Pietro; il tempo sarà galant'uomo ancora in questo... Circa il Porto d'Ancona, anche il sassolino della maldicenza ha voluto gettare senza sapere nulla e senza riflessione al luogo..." See De Seta, "Vanvitelli e G. B. Piranesi," 117.

The hostility between Piranesi and Vanvitelli became mutual after Piranesi's attacks and the architectural competitions that they both strived to win.<sup>122</sup>

I claim that Piranesi cathartically depicted many references to Vanvitelli in the *Carceri* to ridicule the opponent's choices. In plate XI, for example, Piranesi referred to his rival by depicting a shell-like form, the signature shape of Vanvitelli, under the vault to the left of the illustration.<sup>123</sup> Interestingly, the comparison between the first and second editions of this plate reveals that Piranesi considerably darkened the shell on the second edition, metaphorically satisfying his desire to obliterate his rival (figures 4.4 and 4.5).<sup>124</sup> The comparison also reveals that Piranesi clarified the ship's forms in this plate on the lower right of the etching, reinforcing the nautical vocabulary that alluded to Ancona.

Ancona had a rich history that began in antiquity. Vanvitelli's redesign was a large-scale project that required the archaeological, architectural, and hydrological knowledge that Piranesi claimed to himself.<sup>125</sup> Ultimately, Piranesi must have greatly envied the opportunity to work on such a magnificent project. Many nautical and port references that Piranesi used in the *Carceri* alluded to Ancona. For instance, in plate XV, Piranesi repeated the shell-like forms of the plate XI below the arcade to the right of the etching. This time, however, he circumscribed a head of an ambiguous form that allude either to a human or a beast's head within the shell. The resemblance between the face and Vanvitelli's portrait is, at least, suggestive (figures 4.6 and 4.7).

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<sup>122</sup> De Seta, 123.

<sup>123</sup> Salvatore Scarfone, "Luigi Vanvitelli, the Architect," *Royal Palace of Caserta* (blog), accessed June 5, 2018, <http://www.reggiadicasertaunofficial.it/en/art/luigi-vanvitelli/>.

<sup>124</sup> Scarfone.

<sup>125</sup> The Greeks used the natural configuration of Ancona as a port since the fourth-century BCE.

Piranesi also ridiculed Vanvitelli in plate XIV through the arch that alluded to the Clementine Arch, proposed and designed by Vanvitelli to pay homage to his patron, pope Clement XII (figure 4.8). Vanvitelli's idea for the arch, nonetheless, was outrageous. He altered the glorious ancient Trojan arch already existent in the locale and juxtaposed his "weak" modern Arco Clementino in one of its sides, which, I assume, had shocked Piranesi.<sup>126</sup> The result is that the arch presents two different façades, the ancient and the modern. I propose that Piranesi depicted an allusion to the Arco Clementino through the oddly inserted triumphal arch on the landing of the staircases. He also "restored" the ancient structures with pointed arches existent in Ancona by "using" them on the arcades in plate XIV.<sup>127</sup>

Piranesi grudgingly witnessed in a couple of years after the publication of the first edition of the *Carceri* (1749-50) the triumph of Vanvitelli's "bad taste" in the commission of the Palace of Caserta from the Bourbon king Charles III of Naples. To supply its fountains, the palace required a colossal aqueduct comparable in scale to the ones of antiquity. How enticed Piranesi's imagination might have become with the idea of emulating the great ancient Roman engineers! How might Piranesi had wished to design an aqueduct with his assumed Venetian and archaeological and hydrological expertise!

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<sup>126</sup> In the Roman period, Trajan (98-117) had a decisive role in expanding the port and the Senate ordered circa 100 an arch in his honor.

<sup>127</sup> Piranesi might had mentioned the pointed arch as a reference to Vanvitelli's design for the façade of the gothic Cathedral of Milan. Vanvitelli has worked in the project in 1745, which once more accords to the years in which Piranesi conceived the *Carceri*. "Vanvitelli's Project: A Possibile Facade," Duomo di Milano, accessed June 5, 2018, <https://archivio.duomomilano.it/en/infopage/vanvitellis-project-a-possibile-facade/3741c471-25ea-4b58-887b-9caca542a9bf/>.



As a parenthesis, Charles III is the same monarch that in the 1740s rejected Piranesi's engraving for the commemorative publication on the birth of the sovereign's male heir, Filippo.<sup>128</sup> The pharaonic palazzo was executed by "convicts and galley slaves" among its workers.<sup>129</sup> Piranesi took the opportunity to criticize the enterprise as a whole, which also helps to explain the objects that Piranesi added and emphasized in the second edition of the *Carceri* (1761). Piranesi clarified the forms of the ships and increased the number of chains, possibly referring to the slaves. The palazzo, intended to rival Versailles, was the very concretization of *cattivo gusto*, including the architect's aesthetic choices, the building's purpose at service of Absolutism, and the ethical issues that the construction might have raised.<sup>130</sup>

Piranesi also took advantage of the turmoil that involved Vanvitelli's work on the dome of the Basilica of Saint Peter to mock his adversary.<sup>131</sup> One of the main challenges that Vanvitelli faced as the architect of the Basilica were the fissures of the dome, existent at least since the seventeenth-century. Together with Giovanni Poleni (1683 – 1761), Vanvitelli examined and provided solutions to fix the dome "against the opinions of some of Rome's most learned scientists."<sup>132</sup> The solution, as Poleni exposed in the justification that Pope Benedict XIV requested, was the use of chains on the base of the

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<sup>128</sup> The book was published in 1749 with the title *Narrazione delle Solenni Reali Feste fatte celebrare in Napoli da sua Maestà il Re delle Due Sicilie Carlo Infante di Spagna, Duca di Parma, per la Nascita del suo Primogenito Filippo Real Principe delle Due Sicilie*. For details of the intricate circumstances of the rejection, including the innumerable attempts that Piranesi submitted to the court of Charles III and the defense of Bottari, see Minor, "Rejecting Piranesi."

<sup>129</sup> Bailey, *Baroque & Rococo*, 23.

<sup>130</sup> Vanvitelli designed the palace along the year of 1751. The construction took thirty years, from 1752 to 1772. In 1756, Vanvitelli published a book of prints on the royal palace titled *Dichiarazione dei disegni del Reale palazzo di Caserta*.

<sup>131</sup> Vanvitelli worked as the architect of the Basilica of Saint Peter from 1742 to 1747.

<sup>132</sup> Robin L. Thomas, "From the Library to the Printing Press: Luigi Vanvitelli's Life with Books," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69, no. 4 (December 2010): 512, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jsah.2010.69.4.508>.

dome.<sup>133</sup> As a result, I propose that Piranesi filled the illustrations of the *Carceri* with the questionable chains.

Chains are among the most used objects in the *Carceri*. The comparison between the two editions reveals that Piranesi largely increased their presence and visibility. Chains are powerful enough to holding back heavy elements, ships, machinery, wild animals, people. Their metaphor for the ties of the mind is evident. Piranesi's chains also hold back the time, keeping it from passing by. In Piranesi's mind, chains kept people from moving forward to a new social order and to a new style.

With the nautical elements, Piranesi evinced the pro-Rome ideology developed during his education in Venice. As a Venetian, he evoked a subject matter and an imagery that made part of his early experiences in his hometown, be it consciously or not. Piranesi also promoted the magnificence of Rome as one additional argument in the Greco-Roman controversy. Rome's naval achievements, represented by the *naumachiae* and naval trophies, corresponded to the engineering excellence that the aqueducts, sewers, and other structures made evident. The identification of these elements as I proposed reinforces Piranesi's arguments regarding the magnificence of Rome in the *Carceri* and other publications. I also proposed the link between the port-like spaces and the works of Vanvitelli as a way of criticizing and even mocking Piranesi's adversary.

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<sup>133</sup> The justification was published on *Memorie istoriche della gran cupola del tempio vaticano e de' danni di essa, e de' ristoramenti loro* (1748). See Thomas, "From the Library to the Printing Press."



Figure 4.1 Detail of the title page in which Piranesi signed “architetto veneziano.”

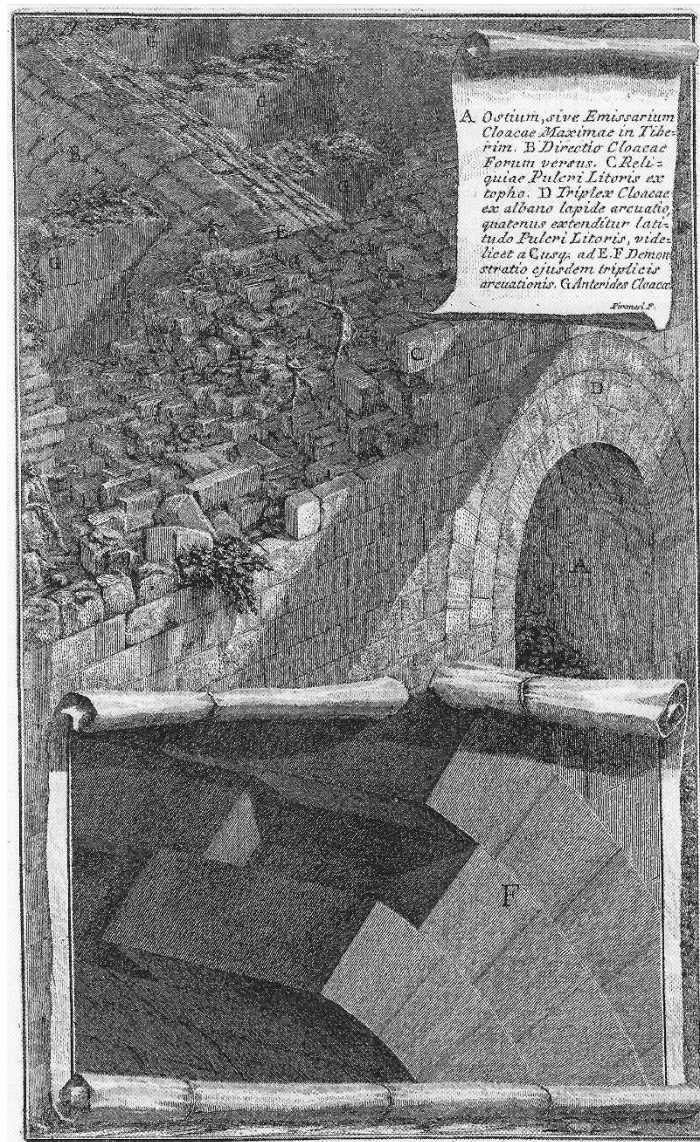


Figure 4.2 Cloaca Maxima in *Della Magnificenza*.  
 From: Piranesi, G. B. *Della magnificenza e  
 d'Architettura de' Romani*. Roma, 1761.

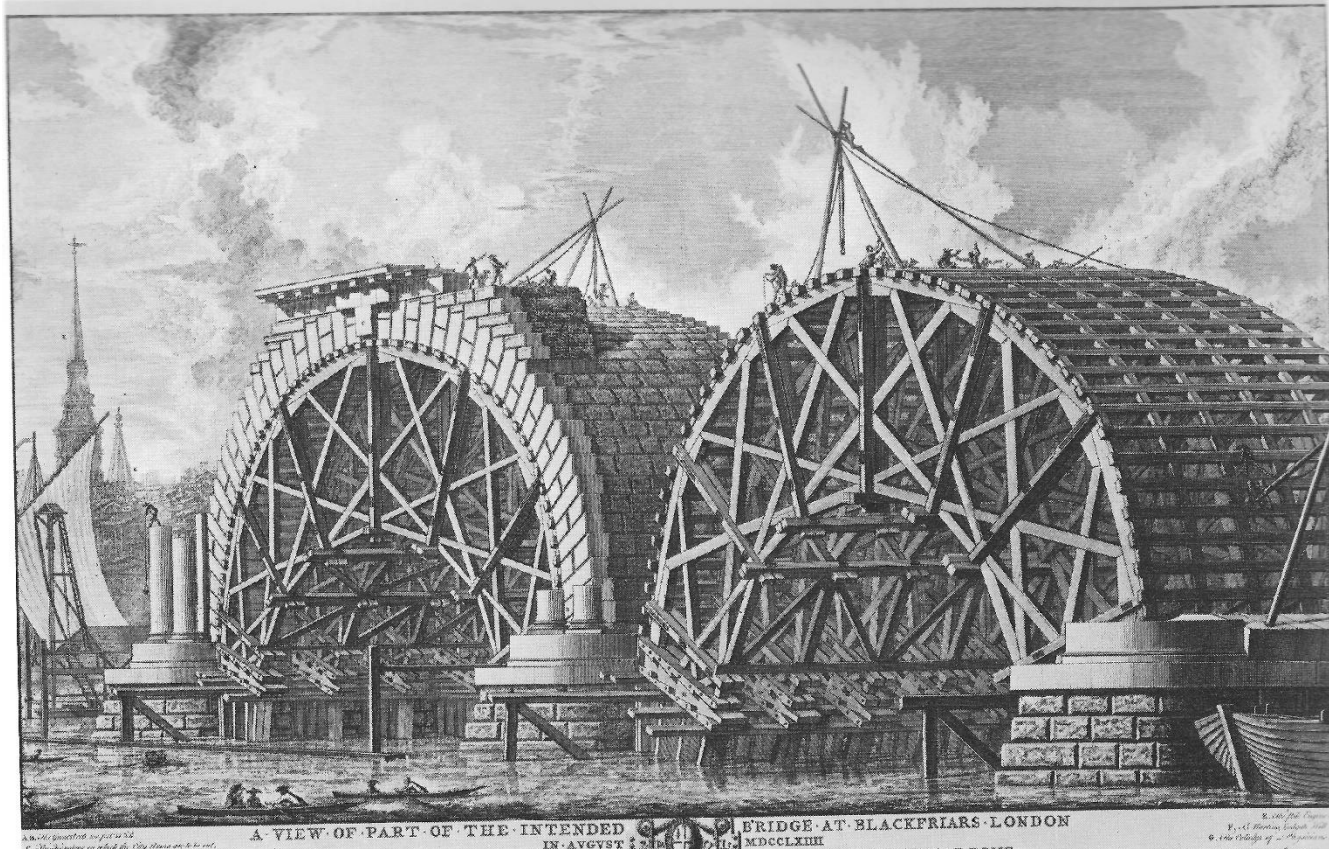


Figure 4.3 Blackfriars Bridge under construction, etching by Piranesi from a drawing by Robert Mylne. From: Wilton-Ely, John. *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1978, figure 101.





Figure 4.4 Detail of shell in plate VIII (first edition).



Figure 4.5 Detail of shell in plate VIII (second edition).



Figure 4.6 Detail of human head inscribed in a shell-like form in plate XV.



Figure 4.7 Portrait of Luigi Vanvitelli (detail). In: Stefano Torselli, "Luigi Vanvitelli architetto tardo barocco," baroque, arte e cultura nel periodo barocco, accessed June 26, 2018, <http://www.baroque.it/arte-barocca/architettura-barocca/luigi-vanvitelli-architetto-tardo-barocco.html>.



Figure 4.8 Arco Traiano/Clementino in the port of Ancona. Sergey Sosnovskiy, “Arch of Trajan. Ancona,” 2008, <http://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=3932>.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE TORTURE AND THE LAW

*Invenzioni capric. di Carceri* (1749-50) was the first publication in which Piranesi exalted the superiority of Rome through the law. Piranesi's successive intellectual development concerning the theme throughout the 1750s culminated in two different publications in 1761. The first, mainly in text, was *Della Magnificenza e d'Architettura de' Romani*. The other, exclusively in images, was *Carceri d'Invenzione*.

In the Greco-Roman controversy, which Piranesi embraced with unparalleled vigor, law and architecture were two sides of the same token. Piranesi greatly relied on the principle that law is a reflex of the degree of development of a civilization in the *Carceri* as well as in later publications.<sup>134</sup> Just as Piranesi promoted Roman architecture to elevate the aesthetics, so he promoted the *lex romana* to elevate the ethical parameters of his epoch and to create awareness of the existent flaws in the law. Both justice, the outcome of law, and taste are concepts that encompass the faculty of good judgement. In criticizing a specific code of rules, Piranesi was remarking on the whole culture from which those rules originated. In analogy, the formulation of a fair law, such as those of the Romans, in Piranesi's opinion, was a sign of a developed sense of morals and fine culture.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Minor, *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste*.

<sup>135</sup> As Calvesi puts it, "La grandezza romana deriva dalla virtù dei romani, e la virtù dei romani dalla custodia del diritto romano" (The Roman greatness derives from the virtue of the Romans, and the virtue of the Romans from the custody of Roman law). See Calvesi, "Ideologia e Riferimenti delle 'Carceri,'" 344.

For Piranesi, the magnificence seen in Roman architecture corresponded with an equally sophisticated elaboration of the law.<sup>136</sup> In *Della Magnificenza*, Piranesi emphasized the role of the law as the base of the civil society and explained, along these lines, the superiority of Romans as creators of the most perfect law system. In the book, Piranesi textually affirmed that the Roman king Tullus Hostilius (reign 673 – 642 BCE), whose reign preceded the contact between Greece and Rome, was the major author of civil law. “Among the principal arguments brought against the Greeks by Piranesi in the early pages of *Della Magnificenza*, was the superior character of the *lex romana*, founded upon civil virtue and equity in primitive times, especially under the Kings,” summarizes John Wilton-Ely.<sup>137</sup>

I claim that, beyond a resource to captivate the audience, torture in the *Carceri* was a metaphorical representation of the decaying morals of Piranesi’s epoch. In parallel to the contemporary decay of architecture, he represented the contemporary, not ancient, torture as a symbol of political, religious, and moral decadence. Correspondingly, Piranesi linked the architectural and engineering achievements of ancient Rome to the fair *lex romana*. The historical context enlightens the allusion to the debate in the illustrations of the *Carceri* of 1749/50 and their re-emergence in 1761, more than one decade later.<sup>138</sup> The debate only grew between Piranesi’s two publications and remained a heated topic over many other years. Although part of the Roman everyday life in the *settecento*, physical punishment was under scrutiny after the publication of many books revising the penal

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<sup>136</sup> Calvesi, 344.

<sup>137</sup> Wilton-Ely, *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, 88.

<sup>138</sup> Piranesi’s beloved monuments became the background for official punishments such as whippings (the *cavaletto*), and public executions. Hangings, often followed by dismemberments, were the most common method of execution, although hitting with a mallet was also a much rarer but spectacular possibility. In Rome, the most common place of execution was the Piazza del Ponte di Sant’Angelo. See Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment*, 229.

system – or the lack of it - then in force.<sup>139</sup> Torture in Rome was abolished by law only in 1831, but the important point for the *Carceri* is that the debate concerning legal criminal procedures was active since the seventeenth century, not only in Italy. A strong movement demanding codification emerged in many places of Europe, in tandem with the spirit of the Enlightenment. Countries such as France and Germany started updating their medieval rules by adopting legal concepts from the ancient Roman laws.<sup>140</sup>

The new theories concerning law and punishment that Piranesi incorporated in the visual discourse of the *Carceri* postulated the separation of church and civil society in the judicial process. New perspectives on the penal system also condemned torture and capital punishment. The brutality of the legal criminal procedures was the Achilles' heel of the papal administration.<sup>141</sup>

I assume that Piranesi feared that the “revolutionary” purport of his ideas concerning the law would be easily recognizable, he did not claim authorship in the frontispiece of the first edition of the *Carceri*. This peculiarity goes against Piranesi's personality. As emphasized by many, he was “very conceited about his work and... extremely sensitive

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<sup>139</sup> The Rome that the young Piranesi first encountered in the mid eighteenth-century was a chaotic environment in regard to justice. There were no unified judicial system nor penal codes. The police, constituted by two different factions, was corrupt, violent, and ineffective. See Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment*.

<sup>140</sup> At that time, Rome's judicial rules were based on decrees, the Canon law, and the 1596-1607's compilation *Praxis et theoricæ criminalis* of Prospero Farinacio. Figures of the epoch started condemning the *status quo* of tribunals and legal processes in general. Ludovico Muratori, for instance, published *Dei difetti della Giurisprudenza* in 1742, demonstrating the flaws in the existing procedures. The most notable authors, however, was the French Montesquieu and his enormously influential *De L'Sprit des Lois*, published in Paris in 1748 and available in Italy as soon as 1749, and Cesare Beccaria's *Dei Delitti e Delle Pene* of 1764. Two years after, Cosimo Amidei published *La chiesa e la repubblica dentro i loro limiti*. Both Montesquieu and Beccaria published anonymously their first editions. Their defense of the separation between powers, combined with Amidei's concept of the laicization of the courts, were not pleasant ideas for the Catholic Church, that felt its authority threatened. The books were included in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. See Gross.

<sup>141</sup> Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment*.

to flattery.”<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, due to the potential reaction of the Catholic church, whose power was threatened by the distinction of concepts such as sin and crime, Piranesi followed the attitude of authors like Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672 – 1750) and Cesare Beccaria (1738 – 1794) and published the *Carceri* anonymously.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, he associated the illustrations with the genre of *capriccio* by naming the series “*Invenzioni capric[ciose] di Carceri*”<sup>144</sup>(my emphasis).

## 5.1 TERROR, TORTURE, AND THE LAW

Piranesi used the sensationalist imagery of torture to arouse strong feelings in his audience and to create empathy for his causes. Although Piranesi depicted explicit physical torture scenes only in plates II and X, he evoked a gloomy atmosphere in all the sixteen etchings. The terror he produced through the potent chiaroscuro and the desperate gestures of the ghostly human figures induced a specific mood of psychological discomfort in the beholders.

The emotional charge that Piranesi employed in the *Carceri* justifies its distinct formal approach in comparison to his other works.<sup>145</sup> The “unknown” that Piranesi conjured up through the formal ambiguity of the imaginary prisons is a great component in the construction of the terror. “We suffer more in imagination than in reality,” said Seneca

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<sup>142</sup> The assertion quoted is from the English architect James Lewis after visiting Piranesi. See De Seta, “Vanvitelli e G. B. Piranesi,” 112.

<sup>143</sup> Lodovico Muratori published the first issues of *De’ difetti della giurisprudenza* in 1742 and Cesare Beccaria published *Dei delitti e delle pene* in 1764 anonymously.

<sup>144</sup> For the significance of the genre of *capriccio* in the *Carceri*, especially to the first edition of 1749-50 (*Invenzioni capric. di Carceri*), see Gavuzzo-Stewart, *Nelle Carceri Di G.B. Piranesi*, chaps. III-II ‘capriccio’.

<sup>145</sup> The only exception is the series of the *Grotteschi*, a series of four plates that also presented distinct formal characteristics. Nonetheless, even the approach that Piranesi used in the *Grotteschi* cannot be compared to the *Carceri* in that the former series is clearly a *capriccio* and has a fantastic subject-matter.

the Younger, one of the heads Piranesi depicted in plate II. Piranesi had already shown technical mastery of the etching process in his earlier works. In the *Carceri*, he modified his own style and deliberately dissolved the objective clarity of forms to make his audience face the fearful unknown, stimulating their imagination. The loose linework that he employed in the whole series, so different from the precision of his other works, especially *Prima Parte di Architettura e Prospettiva* and his *vedute*, reinforced the macabre atmosphere of the prisons. Either recognizable or not, the torture machines, combined with the profusion of spikes in almost illegible objects, suggested violence and pain.

While the innovative theoretical purposes of the *Carceri* reflected in the formal treatment of the etchings, Piranesi linked punishment, law, and justice by recycling the iconography from previous examples by other artists. Prison scenes were a common and popular subject matter in the eighteenth century. Many are the artists that had worked with the subject, which includes important influential artists on Piranesi's career such as Filippo Juvarra (1678 – 1736), Ferdinando Bibiena (1656 – 1743), and even Piranesi's archrival Luigi Vanvitelli, among others (figures 5.1 to 5.4). Largely influenced by theater and stage design, the precedent illustrations show very similar iconographical features and spatial configurations, albeit much less complex than those of Piranesi. Communal large spaces instead of cells were frequent, as well as metal rings, ropes, and pulleys (figure 5.5).

The iconography of prison scenes depicted the actual elements present in contemporary penitentiary environments. In the *Carceri*, Piranesi depicted the commonest eighteenth-century methods of torture, such as the *corda* and the *veglia*, in plates II and XIV. The

former consisted of suspending seven to ten meters high the tied victim with the aid of a racking rope. In the latter, the victim was tied and had to find balance for five to ten hours precariously seated on a pointed stool, in plate X (figure 2.4). He also suggested the *antenna*, a sort of cage for solitary confinement, in many plates (figures 5.6 and 5.7).<sup>146</sup> Moreover, the wheels that Piranesi depicted throughout the *Carceri*, either whole or in fragments, alluded to the Catherine Wheel, used for both torture and capital punishment. Other physical torture devices suggestively appeared in Piranesi's imaginary prisons, such as iron maidens, as I explored in Chapter Two.

I proposed that Piranesi also explored disorientation and stagnation as powerful psychological torture methods in the *Carceri*. The former has its main trigger in the endless and labyrinthine spatial configuration. The majority of the human figures that Piranesi depicted clearly are lost and unable to find an escape. Bridges and stairs, by definition, are elements of connection and movement. They allow people to go from one place to another; ultimately, to change and move forward. Nevertheless, the bridges and stairs in the *Carceri* constituted, instead of exits or connection elements, obstacles. Blocked and leading nowhere, the bridges and stairs acted just like prisons.

## 5.2 THE ROLE OF THE ACCADEMIA DELL'ARCADIA

Piranesi's involvement with the *Accademia degli Arcadi* was vital for the development of the theme of the law in the *Carceri*. The number of lawyers and jurists among its members exposed Piranesi to the debate. Several influential figures within the

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<sup>146</sup> The representation of the *antenna* in the plates of the *Carceri* are usually ambiguous, in that this torture machine resembles a lantern. Nonetheless, he had depicted and cited the antenna in plate *Carcere Oscura* in the previous publication *Prima Parte di Architettura e Prospettiva* (1743). Piranesi's caption for *Carcere Oscura* reads "*Carcere Oscura con Antenna pel supplizio de'malfattori.*"

academy had enough knowledge and competence to take part in the debate concerning judicial practices.<sup>147</sup> In the Arcadian academy's meetings, law and taste were intertwined themes. Many of its members published books on the two subjects. The illustrious Muratori, for example, was a talented jurist that published both *Reflessioni sopra il buon gusto nelle scienze e nelle arti* (Observations on the good taste in the sciences and the arts) and *De' difetti della giurisprudenza* (The faults in the jurisprudence). Similarly, one former founder of Arcadia, Gian Vincenzo Gravina (1664-1718), jurist, poet, classical scholar, and professor of Law at the Sapienza, published a famous book on the history of civil law and also the influential *Della Ragion poetica*.<sup>148</sup>

The scholarship on Piranesi does not sufficiently stress the impact of the ex-Arcadian Gravina on Piranesi, much less to the *Carceri*.<sup>149</sup> This is a fruitful topic that I will briefly mention according to the purposes of this thesis but that deserves further investigation. Gravina died before Piranesi was born but, as one of the founders of the *Accademia degli Arcadi*, his legacy was remarkable. Also, the influence of his thought on young Piranesi was tremendous. For instance, he elaborated the foundational idea for the *Carceri* that poetry (a concept that in the Arcadian context also encompasses art) “should reproduce reality and aim at **instructing by images and allegories** (my emphasis).”<sup>150</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>147</sup> See Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment*.

<sup>148</sup> In 1708, Gravina published *Della Ragion poetica libri due*, a book that Hanns Gross cites as a “codification of neoclassicism.” The book on the history of civil law's title is *Originum juris civilis libri tres* (Naples, 1701) It provided Gravina acknowledgement throughout Europe, including Montesquieu's mention in his *Esprit des Lois*. See Hanns Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment: The Post-Tridentine Syndrome and the Ancien Regime*.

<sup>149</sup> Gravina founded, together with Giovanni Maria Crescimbeni (1663 – 1728), the *Accademia degli Arcadi* in 1690. Nonetheless, disagreements between them created a schism in the academy. In 1711, Gravina left the old *Accademia degli Arcadi* to found a short-term parallel academy, that he called *Arcadia Nuova*. See Minor, *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste*; Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment*.

<sup>150</sup> Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment*, 291.

like Piranesi, he also promoted classicism as a way of restoring the cultural decadence of his time.

Gravina postulated law as the ordering principle of societies and, at the same time, the reflex of its collective character. Additionally, he attributed to artists a prominent social and moral role in diffusing taste and, consequently, called artists to imbue in their works “certain legal, theoretical, and republican ideologies.”<sup>151</sup> The combination of all these factors urged Piranesi’s ambitions to discuss law and taste through the images of the *Carceri*, rather than in words like in the subsequent publications.

### 5.3 THE ANALOGY BETWEEN ANCIENT AND MODERN ROME

The phrase *Impietati et malis artibus* (impiety and bad arts) that Piranesi inscribed in plate XVI, was, above all, Piranesi’s criticism of his own time. It refers to the contemporary bad taste and impiety, revealed in the lack of a reasonable judicial system.

In the *Carceri*, Piranesi created a narrative that chronologically started in plate XVI by the regal period, passed by the transition of the kingdom to the republic, and continued in plate II, in which the narrative goes from the end of the republic to the first emperors. He acutely cited specific episodes of ancient Rome’s history to feed his arguments for the superiority and autonomy of the Roman law at specific times in history and to illustrate the disastrous impact of the Greek culture in Rome.

With these references, Piranesi also invited his audience to meditate on the values that the different political systems of Rome presented and to build an analogous analysis of their own time. He wanted to prove that as much as ancient Rome succumbed to the

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<sup>151</sup> Minor, *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste*, 125.



Hellenist culture, so was modern Rome succumbing to the philhellenism of authors such as Allan Ramsay (1682-1731), Julien-David Le Roy (1724 – 1803), and Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717 – 1768).<sup>152</sup>

Following the chronology that Piranesi suggested in plates II and XVI, the first event is that concerning the king Tullus Hostilius (reign 673 – 642 BCE) and the trial of one of the Horatii brothers. In plate XVI, Piranesi incised Horatius' verdict into the capital of one column: INFAME SCEIVSS ... RI INFELICI SUSPE....<sup>153</sup> "Hung him on a barren tree" was his capital penalty. The story is a key point within the *Carceri*, which demands a brief contextualization. In *Ab urbe condita*, Livy tells that, after heroically conquering Alba Longa in the Horatii brothers' duel against the Curatii, the only surviving Horatius was received in Rome with a triumphal march.<sup>154</sup> During the march, he saw his sister Camilla, engaged to one of the killed Albans, mourning over the death of the defeated enemies. On seeing this, he immediately assassinated her.

The convict's father appealed the tribunal's verdict. King Tullus did not want to kill the patriotic hero neither, delegating the case to the people of Rome through the curia. Due to Horatius's virtue and to the "justifiable" reason for the crime, the sentence was not executed. Instead, the people decided that Horatius would, in lieu of the death penalty, have a symbolic punishment by passing his neck beneath a wooden beam, named

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<sup>152</sup> In 1755, Ramsay published an essay in London asserting that architecture had evolved from Egypt to Greece, and that Romans were "not only copyists but 'a gang of meer plunderers, sprung from those who had been, but a little while before their conquest of Greece, naked thieves and runaway slaves.'" See Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*, p. 127

<sup>153</sup> The complete quotation, which was taken from Livy, is "Caput obnube liberatoris urbis huius; arbori infelici suspense." See Malcolm Campbell, "Piranesi and Innovation in Eighteenth-Century Roman Printmaking," in *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Joseph J. Rishel and Edgar Peters Bowron (London: Merrel, 2000), 577.

<sup>154</sup> A duel between the triplet brothers Horatii and three Albans occurred in lieu of a battle. The Albans killed two of the Horatii brothers, but the third one was able to defeat his opponents.

*Sororium Tigillum* (also called *Tigillum Sororis*). Piranesi wanted to show the degree of sophistication of the Roman civilization and the justice of the Roman law, anchored as early as the regal period in the participation of the people instead of on the tyranny of a centralized power. For Piranesi, it was this exemplary institution that saved the heroic Horatius from an unfair death penalty.

Scholars had pointed to the mysterious wooden beams to the right of the plate XVI as the *Sororium Tigillum*.<sup>155</sup> Similar features, nonetheless, appeared in many other plates of the *Carceri*. In the environments of the *Carceri*, the application of a fair law is impossible. I claim that the spikes that Piranesi added to the beams, causing the impossibility of the “passage of the neck,” is a metaphor for the obstruction or lack of true justice.<sup>156</sup> In some illustrations, he located the devices in inaccessible spots, having the same result.<sup>157</sup>

In plate XVI, Piranesi also condemned the beginning of the pernicious impact to the law of a foreigner culture in Rome. The episode of Horatius brings up the message that the apogee of the Roman law, represented by this specific trial, was independent from the influence of Greece, brought to Rome through the law of Solon in the subsequent kingdom of Servius Tullius (reign c. 575 – 535 BCE).<sup>158</sup> Piranesi illustrated the presence of the outsiders in Rome with the reference to King Ancus Martius (reign 642 – 617 BCE) and his concern with the “loss of values resulting from the mingling of

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<sup>155</sup> See Calvesi, Maurizio. *Giovanni Battista e Francesco Piranesi*. Rome: De Luca, 1967, 17, and Campbell, “Piranesi and Innovation in Eighteenth-Century Rome,” in *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century*, 577.

<sup>156</sup> In the title page and in plates III and IV.

<sup>157</sup> In plates V, XI, and XIII.

<sup>158</sup> The law of Solon, in turn, is based on the cruel Athenian law of Dracon. See Rykwert, *The First Moderns*, 378.

diverse settlers” in Rome.<sup>159</sup> Using once more a quotation from Livy, in plate XVI Piranesi reproduced the words AD TERROR EM INCRESCEN AUDACIAE, from when the king ordered the construction of the first Roman prison to “terrify the growing audacity” of Rome’s increasing population.<sup>160</sup> It was the Mamertine Prison.<sup>161</sup> Correspondingly, Piranesi used the Mamertine prison as one of the visual sources for the *Carceri*.<sup>162</sup> The Mamertine was a subterranean two-story prison with a barred hole on the floor of the upper space.<sup>163</sup> The hole was used to lower the prisoners to the bottom chamber, as well as pass them food and water. Likewise, Piranesi depicted the barred hole in four out of the sixteen plates of the *Carceri*.<sup>164</sup> Piranesi explored the subterranean nature of the actual Italian prison to create equally subterranean spaces in the *Carceri*. In plate VII, Piranesi exposed this characteristic by inscribing the lettering “*soterranee carceri incise da Piranesi*” (subterranean prisons incised by Piranesi) into a slab of stone.<sup>165</sup>

In plate XVI, Piranesi provided one more episode to situate the audience in a temporal line. With the two decapitated heads of the sons of Lucius Junius Brutus (545 – 509

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<sup>159</sup> Robison and Piranesi, *Piranesi--Early Architectural Fantasies*, 49.

<sup>160</sup> The passage in Livy is “Carcer ad terrorem incrementis audaciae media Urbe, imminens Foro, aedificatur.” See Calvesi, “Ideologia e Riferimenti delle ‘Carceri,’” 344.

<sup>161</sup> The details of the quotation and its relationship with the *Carcere Mamertino* in Rome is a well-developed topic in the *Carceri*’s scholarship. See, for instance, Robison and Piranesi, *Piranesi--Early Architectural Fantasies*; Wilton-Ely, *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*; Rishel and Bowron, *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century*; Piranesi and Campbell, *Piranesi: The Dark Prisons: An Edition of the Carceri d’ Invenzione from the Collection of The Arthur Ross Foundation*.

<sup>162</sup> Mamertine Prison, or the ancient *Carcer Tullianum*, was constructed circa 650 BCE in the surroundings of the Forum in the Capitoline Hill in Rome. The Mamertine Prison is emblematic for having imprisoned Ancient Rome’s enemies, including, for instance, co-conspirators of Catiline and followers of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, aspects that must have impacted a romanophile such as Piranesi. See Calvesi, “Ideologia e Riferimenti delle ‘Carceri,’” and Marshall, “Piranesi’s Creative Imagination: The Capriccio and the Carceri.”

<sup>163</sup> Marshall, “Piranesi’s Creative Imagination: The Capriccio and the Carceri,” 120.

<sup>164</sup> Plates II, III, V, XII.

<sup>165</sup> The reading of the lettering became even more difficult in the second edition due to the elements that Piranesi added in front of the slab of stone. See Gavuzzo-Stewart, *Nelle Carceri Di G.B. Piranesi*, 88.

BCE), Piranesi evoked the transition of the regal to the republican period and the beginning of the moral decadence of Rome.<sup>166</sup> For Piranesi, the period of the kings and consuls was the most just and elevated in the history of Rome, in that the Greek influence on that period was null. Brutus is a paradoxical personage that also represented an example of extreme patriotism by sacrificing his family for the sake of his republican principles. Nevertheless, the inflexibility and cruelty that he showed to his own sons, in contrast to Tullus' reasonableness, was an evidence of the loss of values about which the kings were worried. The harshness of the law under Brutus and his impiety was a reflex of the Hellenism and the Greek laws of Dracon in Roman territory.<sup>167</sup>

Piranesi continued the narrative towards the moral decadence of Rome in plate II, in which he cited both the last decades of the republic and the beginning of the imperial period. Interestingly, many of the characteristics of this epoch were associated with the baroque at Piranesi's time. Lack of moral principles, excesses of luxury, and vulgar ostentation marked the aristocracy in the end of the ancient Republic, according to the classical literature.<sup>168</sup> It explains the profusion of objects that Piranesi included in the scenario.

I propose that the prominent arch that Piranesi depicted to the left of the illustration divided the figures mentioned in its sides into two periods of Rome. To the left of the arch is the republican period. I claim that, with the incised letters GRACVS, Piranesi started the temporal references by mentioning the brothers Gracchi, most likely

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<sup>166</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>167</sup> Rykwert, *The First Moderns*, 344.

<sup>168</sup> Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 239.

Tiberius (d.133 BCE).<sup>169</sup> Piranesi pictured Gracchus as a martyr of the Republic, a hero that challenged, in name of the People, the despotism of the Senate of the SPQR.<sup>170</sup>

Correspondingly, to the right of the arch Piranesi depicted the imperial period through some of its martyrs. Piranesi wanted to demonstrate, once more, that the unjust punishment of these figures, challengers of the system in force, was a sign of the moral decadence of the Roman law under the Greek influence in the reign of the philhellene Emperor Nero, i.e., as the result of bad judgement.

In plate II, Piranesi used the dramatic and emotional topic of torture in the most explicit fashion of all the sixteen illustrations. He depicted a man being stretched with a rack in an incompatible large scale in comparison to the tiny human figures that people the surroundings. Regardless the outstandingly packed number of elements in this composition, the scale of the tortured man and his malefactors made them the focal point of the illustration. “The Hellenistic injustice and cruelty of the degenerate emperor contrasts with the remote but shining example of primitive Roman justice,” reasoned Joseph Rykwert.<sup>171</sup>

The man in the rack in plate II was also a metaphor for Piranesi himself. Analogously, Piranesi was the one being punished by a retrograde sense of taste with his lack of commissions and by the impact of philhellenism of the eighteenth century. He

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<sup>169</sup> Authors such as Silvia Gavuzzo-Stewart in *Nelle Carceri di G. B. Piranesi* have read the inscription as GRATVS. Others could not identify the letter nor the reference. Although the form of the fifth letter of the inscription is unclear, I propose that it corresponds to a C and refers to one of the Gracchi brothers. My assumption is based on three different criteria: (1) the Gracchi brothers’ time is markedly an epoch of Greek influence on Roman education; (2) they challenged and revealed the tyranny of the Senate on their time; and (3) the allusion to the Gracchi fits as a transition in the temporal narrative that Piranesi built for the Carceri (it started in plate XVI and followed in plate II). For the history of the Gracchi brothers

<sup>170</sup> The SPQR, the *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, was the institution that governed Rome, constituted by a theoretical balance between the consuls (regal power), the Senate (aristocracy), and the People (democracy). See Scullard, 5.

<sup>171</sup> Rykwert, *The First Moderns*, 378.

alluded to the unjustly punished figures by decadent governments to portray himself as a miscomprehended martyr of Rome. His solution was the restoration of the most elevated standards of ancient Rome to fight against the bad taste and judgement that dominated contemporary Rome.

Piranesi was aware that the law was the most important achievement of the Roman civilization, above even architecture and engineering. Piranesi borrowed from Vico the idea that the Twelve Tables, the foundation of the Roman law, was exclusively a Roman development. In his proto-nationalistic endeavor to glorify the Romans, Piranesi highlighted the Roman law and emphasized it as an independent and autonomous accomplishment in the *Carceri*. He knew that this argument was unbeatable and reinforced it in many other publications. Nonetheless, the *Carceri* is the first in which he introduced the debate about law as an argument in the Graeco-Roman controversy. As a matter of fact, it was in the *Carceri* that Piranesi realized the power of the law as a weapon against the philhellenes.

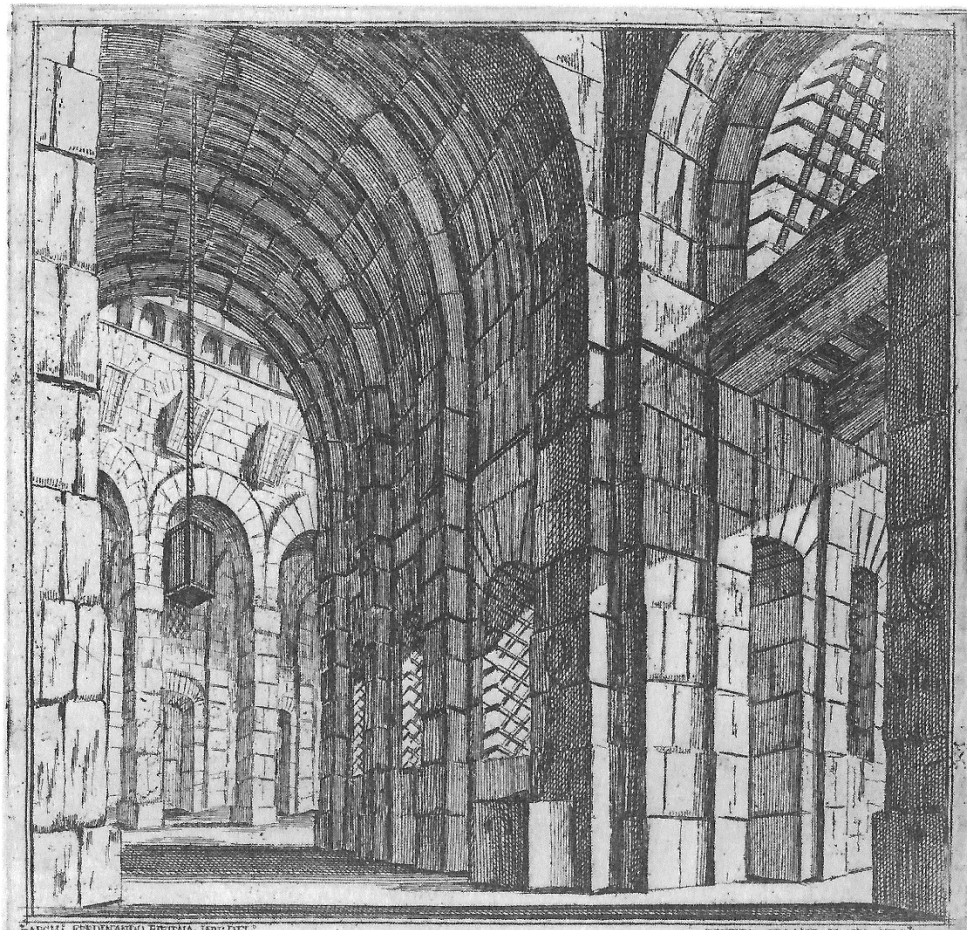


Figure 5.1 Pietro Albani after Ferdinando Bibiena, *Prison Scene*, c. 1705.  
 From: Robison, Andrew, and Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Piranesi-Early  
 Architectural Fantasies: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings*.  
 Washington: Chicago: National Gallery of Art; University of Chicago Press,  
 1986, figure 11.

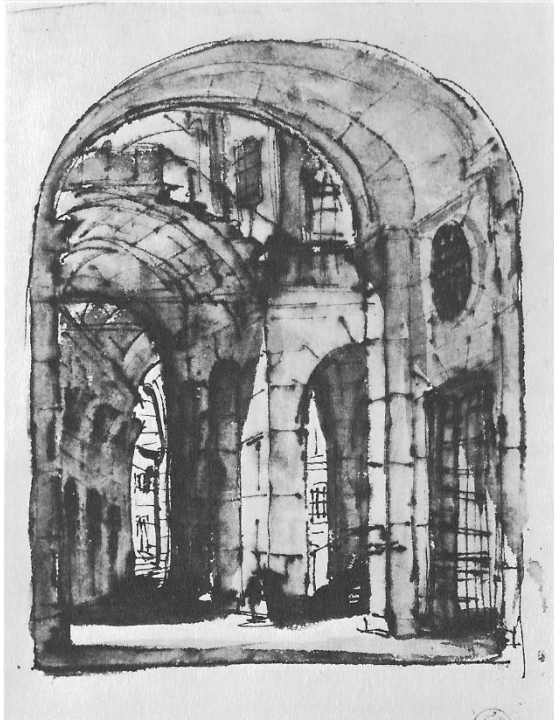


Figure 5.2 Filippo Juvarra, *Prison Scene*, c. 1712. From: Robison, Andrew, and Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Piranesi-Early Architectural Fantasies: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings*. Washington: Chicago: National Gallery of Art; University of Chicago Press, 1986, figure 13.

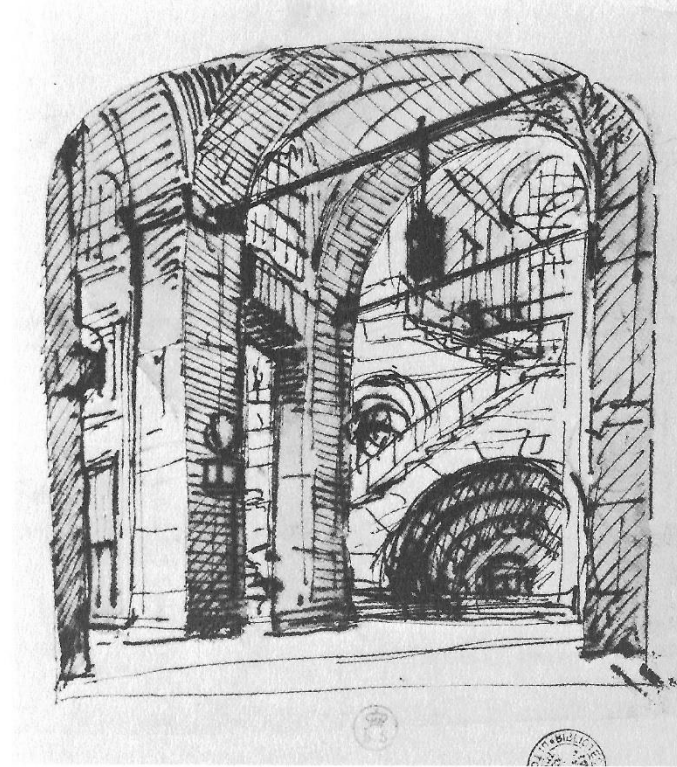


Figure 5.3 Filippo Juvarra, *Prison Scene*, c. 1711. From: Robison, Andrew, and Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Piranesi-Early Architectural Fantasies: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings*. Washington: Chicago: National Gallery of Art; University of Chicago Press, 1986, figure 12.



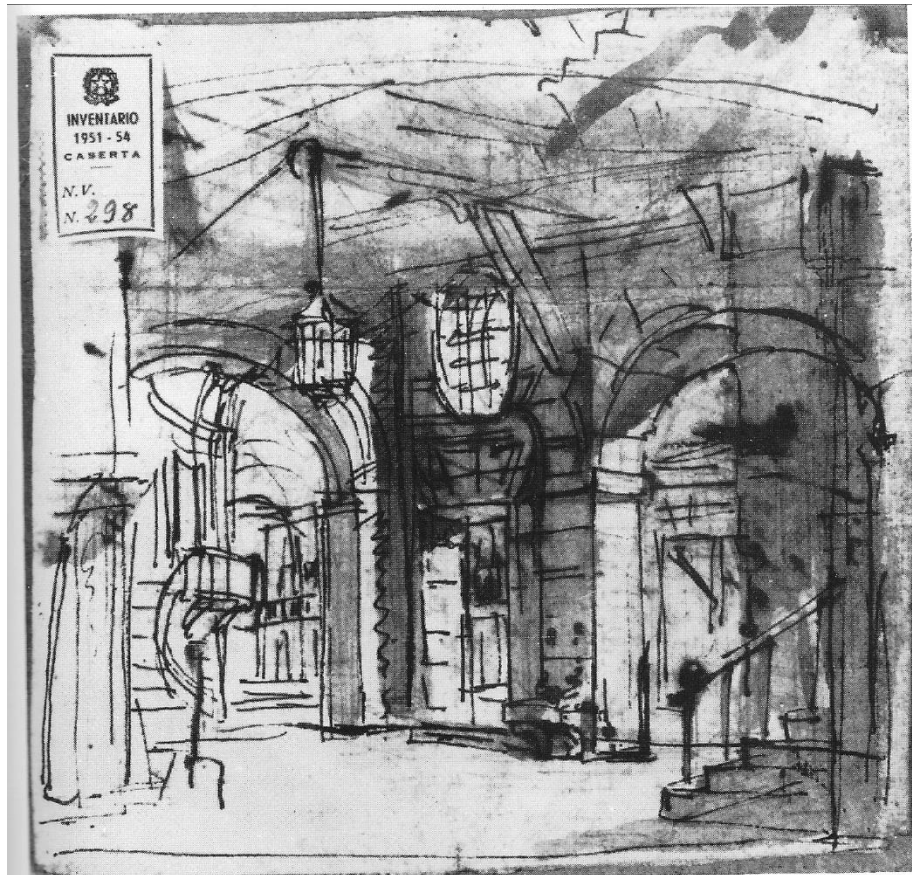


Figure 5.4 Luigi Vanvitelli, *Prison Scene*, 1720s. From: Robison, Andrew, and Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Piranesi-Early Architectural Fantasies: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings*. Washington: Chicago: National Gallery of Art; University of Chicago Press, 1986, figure 14.



Figure 5.5 Daniel Marot, *The Prison of Amadis*, 1702. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Anonymous Fund for the Acquisition of Prints Older than 150 Years.  
[www.harvardartmuseums.org/](http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/)







Figure 5.7 Detail of *antenna* in plate XIV.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

The *Carceri d'Invenzione* is a rough diamond that demands hard work in order to shine. Its facets both absorb and reflect a plethora of significances. The process of revealing them is arduous. It requires not only knowledge, but also feeling. The connections I have proposed in this thesis are just a few within the dense universe that Piranesi brilliantly transposed from his world to the engravings. I am confident that there are many others that I was not able to see. I invite others to cast an attentive glance in these etchings and, through the avenue that I suggested, restore the connections.

My research aimed at releasing the multiple rays of light that emanated from the ambiguous forms in the imaginary prisons. The connections he made through his references to ancient and modern topics offer some of the keys to unlock the illustrations' interpretation. Through the formal and iconographical analysis of the elements and references the shape of some of the keys was revealed. Anchored in the historical context in which the etchings were created and, especially, in the intellectual capacity of Piranesi, I sought to reestablish the connections with contemporary debates and events that occurred around Piranesi.

Ambiguity marks the imagery of the *Carceri d'Invenzione* (literal translation: Prisons of Invention). Ambiguity is in the title of the publication, the spaces Piranesi conceived, and the objects that he represented. Does the title denote fictitious prisons that Piranesi imagined or scenarios that imprison the imagination? Are the spaces endless or

confining? Are the bridges and stairs connecting or separating places? Are we truly seeing what we are seeing in these etchings?

The multiple layers of references within the sixteen etchings could only be achieved through Piranesi's ambiguous forms and the equally multiple possible associations that they offered. The fragments scattered throughout these spaces can allude either to a historical vestige or a modern broken artifact. Trophies may represent both victory and downfall. Every object is potentially a torture machine: lanterns, bollards, beams, pulleys, winches. With these scenarios, Piranesi asked us what is freedom, after all. Certainties do not belong to the imaginary prisons.

The intricate spatiality and the inventiveness of the architecture Piranesi formulated in these illustrations are remarkable. Piranesi created flights of stairs that do not get anywhere and successive empty vast spaces that intercept each other, linked or separated by light, shadow, and, sometimes, fumes. In spite of the unviability of the spaces (which sometimes convey non-Euclidian geometries), the architecture persuades its viewers. The endless and labyrinthine spaces have fascinated generations since their production in the eighteenth-century. The abundance of classical elements cohabiting the spaces with mysterious modern objects is strangely convincing. Piranesi also depicted incoherently scaled human figures in mysterious activities that evoke empathy. Their audience share their anguish.

The *Invenzioni capric. de Carceri* (1749-50) is the first of a series of "response-publications" by Piranesi. His responsiveness is the reason for the production of, for instance, the *Pianta di ampio magnifico collegio* (figure 1.3). As William Chambers recorded, Piranesi wanted to disprove the French Academy's *pensionnaires* of the

accusation that he was not able to conceive a floor plan.<sup>172</sup> In the same vein, Piranesi published in 1757 *Lettere di Giustificazione scritte a Milord Charlemont*.<sup>173</sup> The loss of the patronage that Piranesi took for granted from James Caulfield, Earl of Charlemont motivated the work. Infuriated by the episode, Piranesi produced a vehemently direct set of etchings that aimed at publicizing the nasty character of Charlemont.<sup>174</sup> Likewise, in 1761 Piranesi published *Della Magnificenza e d'Architettura de' Romani* to contest writings of the preceding decade, especially Allan Ramsay's (1713 – 1784) essay in the *Investigator* (1755) called “A Dialogue on Taste,” and Julien-David Le Roy's (1724 – 1803) *Ruines des les plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (1758).<sup>175</sup> The two publications not only claimed the cultural and artistic superiority of Greece but also drew Romans as a vulgar and tasteless civilization.<sup>176</sup> Rather than rely on the subjective debate about taste in

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<sup>172</sup> In William Chambers' words, “A celebrated Italian Artist whose taste and luxuriance of fancy were unusually great, and the effect of whose compositions on paper has seldom been equaled, knew little of construction or calculation, yet less of the contrivance of habitable structures, or the modes of carrying real works into execution, though styling himself an architect. **And when some pensioners of the French Academy at Rome, in the Author's hearing, charged him with ignorance of plans, he composed a very complicated one**, since published in his work; which sufficiently proves, that the charge was not altogether groundless.” (my emphasis). See Bevilacqua, *Taccuini di Modena*, 42; Scott, *Piranesi*, 49.

<sup>173</sup> (Letters of Justification written to Lord Charlemont). Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Lettere di giustificazione scritte a Milord Charlemont e a'di lui agenti di Roma dal signor Piranesi ... intorno la dedica della sua opera delle Antichità rom. fatta allo stesso signor ed ultimamente soppressa* (In Roma: [publisher not identified], 1757).

<sup>174</sup> For the unfolding and details of the story, see Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*, 65–71.

<sup>175</sup> Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Della magnificenza ed architettura de' Romani* (Romae [s.n.], 1761); Allan Ramsay, “A Dialogue on Taste,” *The Investigator*, no. 322 (1755): entire issue; Julien-David Le Roy, *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grece: ouvrage divisé en deux parties, où l'on considere, dans la premiere, ces monuments du côté de l'histoire: et dans la seconde, du côté de l'architecture* (A Paris: Chez H.L. Guerin & L.F. Delatour; Chez Jean-Luc Nyon; A Amsterdam: Jean Neaulme, 1758); Anne Claude Philippe Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines* (Paris : Desaint & Saillant, 1752); Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (A Paris : Chez Duchesne, Libraire, rue S. Jacques, au-dessous de la Fontaine S. Benoît, au Temple du Goût, 1755). Another examples of publications favoring the Greek superiority of the 1750s are Anne Claude Philippe Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines* (Paris: Desaint & Saillant, 1752), <http://archive.org/details/recueildantiquit03cayl>; Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (A Paris: Chez Duchesne, Libraire, rue S. Jacques, au-dessous de la Fontaine S. Benoît, au Temple du Goût, 1755), <http://archive.org/details/surlarchitecture00laug>.

<sup>176</sup> For an overview of the justification and purposes of *Della Magnificenza*, see Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*, 118–31.

*Della Magnificenza*, Piranesi turned to the postulations of magnificence by Livy as a more objective concept.<sup>177</sup> Heather Hyde Minor highlighted that “magnificence provides a means of pivoting away from aesthetics” in *Della Magnificenza*.<sup>178</sup> In the *Carceri*, Piranesi used the same formula. He used law as a discourse that, combined with magnificence, was more easily demonstrable through writings, including those of classical authors.<sup>179</sup>

Following the list of “response-publications,” *Osservazioni sopra la lettre de M. Mariette* accompanied the *Parere su l’Architettura* in the same volume in 1765.<sup>180</sup> The publication was a response to Pierre-Jean Mariette’s comments on *Della Magnificenza* published in the *Gazette Litteraire de L’Europe* in 1764. The heart of the issue, this time, was the Etruscans. The French scholar contested Piranesi’s argument that the greatest achievements of the Romans had origins among the Etruscans and were, hence, independent of Greek influence. Mariette countered arguing that Etruscans were Greek colonists.<sup>181</sup> As a consequence, what Etruscans had transmitted to the Romans was, in its roots, Greek. Even worse, Mariette asserted that “Roman art had been made by Greek

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<sup>177</sup> See Susanna Pasquali and Oona M. Smyth, “Piranesi Architect, Courtier, and Antiquarian: The Late Rezzonico Years (1762-1768),” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 4 (2006): 171–94.

<sup>178</sup> Minor, *Piranesi’s Lost Words*, 128.

<sup>179</sup> For Piranesi, the testimony of the Greeks lauding Roman achievements was the most undeniable evidence for the Roman superiority. Just like Piranesi used the Greek Dyonisius as a source to prove the magnificence of the Roman architecture in *Della Magnificenza*, so he used the Greek Polybius to prove the role of the Roman law in the *Carceri*. See Minor, 129; For the role of Polybius, see H. H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome from 133 B.C. to A.D. 68*, 4th ed, University Paperbacks; 56 (London, New York: Methuen; distributed in the U.S.A. by Harper & Row, 1976), 8; 204.

<sup>180</sup> Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Osservazioni di Gio. Batista Piranesi sopra la Lettre de M. Mariette aux auteurs de la Gazette de l’Europe: inserita nel supplemento dell’istessa gazzetta stampata Dimanche 4, Novembre MDCCLIV & parere su l’architettura, con una prefazione ad un nuovo trattato della introduzione e del progresso delle belle arti in Europa ne’ tempi antichi* (In Roma: [Per Generoso Salomoni], 1765).

<sup>181</sup> For details, see Minor, *Piranesi’s Lost Words*, 142–51.



slaves.”<sup>182</sup> Piranesi, emulating a *collage* technique, reproduced the pages of the *Gazette* in his *Osservazioni* to refute every argument and added new visual and textual evidences to support his cause.

The *Parere su l'Architettura*, a second volume within the same publication, was a dialogue between a teacher and a student about taste. In addition to contesting Mariette's arguments, Piranesi challenged the principles of his *paesano* Carlo Lodoli (1690 – 1761). Whereas Lodoli was very critical of the orders and defended a set of principles to use ornament according to the truth of the materials, Piranesi believed that the architect should be free to adorn “and not be required to adhere to obsolete rules.”<sup>183</sup> The quarrel between the two concerning ornament explains the “violence of the architectural forms” both in plate II of the *Carceri* and in the architectural drawings in the plates of *Parere* (figure 1.4). The overwhelmingly inventive and profusely ornamented façades that Piranesi depicted in these two publications are the materialization of Piranesi's understandings regarding the use of ornament in opposition to Lodoli's teachings.<sup>184</sup>

At last, *Diverse Maniere d'Adornare i Camini* (1769) is Piranesi's last response-publication.<sup>185</sup> Much more than a mere pattern book, *Diverse Maniere* was the culmination of Piranesi's development of an epistemology of the classical past. He also took the opportunity to reply to the criticism of Bertrand Capmartin de Chaupy's (1720 –

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<sup>182</sup> Erika Naginski, “Preliminary Thoughts on Piranesi and Vico,” *Res Anthropology and Aesthetics* 53/54, no. 1 (2008): 164.

<sup>183</sup> Marc J Neveu, “Architectural Lessons of Carlo Lodoli (1690-1761): Indole of Material and of Self” (School of Architecture. McGill University, Montréal, 2005), 115.

<sup>184</sup> Joseph Rykwert, *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1980), 375.

<sup>185</sup> Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini: ed ogni altra parte degli edifizj desunte dall'architettura Egizia, Etrusca, e Greca con un ragionamento apologetico in difesa dell'architettura Egizia e Toscana ...* = *Divers manners of ornamenting chimneys and all other parts of houses taken from the Egyptian, Tuscan and Grecian architecture, with an apologetical essay in defence of the Egyptian and Tuscan architecture ...* = *Differentes manieres d'orner les cheminées ...* (In Roma: Nella stamperia di Generoso Salomoni, 1769).

1798) introduction to *Découverte de la Maison de Campagne d'Horace* (1767-69).<sup>186</sup>

Piranesi mocked Capmartin by including in *Diverse Maniere* a feces or penis-shaped map of Horace's villa with the name and attribute of the author: "Cap. Marten Chaupy, capo confuso" (confused head) in the "binding" (figure 1.5).<sup>187</sup> Ultimately, the book is also a version of the "history of art" to rival Winckelmann's (1717 – 1768) *History of Art of Antiquity* (1764).<sup>188</sup>

Piranesi, as the list of publications shows, was undoubtedly audacious.<sup>189</sup> The episode of the "misprint" of the name of the first publisher of *Invenzioni capric. di Carceri* (1749-50), Jean/Giovanni Bouchard, is another clear proof of his borderline boldness (or insolence?). The first issue of the publication brought the name engraved as "Buzard," instead of the correct form Bouchard. Piranesi corrected the "typo" in subsequent issues (figures 1.6 and 1.7). Considering the laborious and slow process of incising and etching, it is very unlikely that an engraver would overlook the name's spelling of his patron! Additionally, *buzard* is, in eighteenth-century Venetian dialect, the word for "bugger."<sup>190</sup> Piranesi was not afraid of taking the chance to express his veiled contempt, even if that could cost him his career.

This list of overconfident attitudes shows that it is not surprising that many of Piranesi's biographies portrayed him as a lunatic, neurotic, and violent person. Piranesi

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<sup>186</sup> Bertrand Capmartin de Chaupy, *Découverte de la maison de campagne d'Horace* ouvrage utile pour l'intelligence de cet auteur (Zempel, 1767).

<sup>187</sup> For details, see Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*, chap. 5. "How Piranesi made a Book that Question it All".

<sup>188</sup> Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* (Los Angeles, California: Getty Research Institute, 2006).

<sup>189</sup> As Horace Walpole observed about the artist, "[...] what taste in his boldness! What grandeur in his wildness! What labour and thought both in his rashness and details." See Wendorf, "Piranesi's Double Ruin," 162.

<sup>190</sup> Joseph J. Rishel and Edgar Peters Bowron, *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Merrel, 2000), 573.

was an eccentric, that is very clear, and perhaps disproportionately reactive to the debates around him.<sup>191</sup> However, despite some of the gaps in the artist's biography, I did not find any indication of a "dark brain" for Piranesi.<sup>192</sup>

The *Carceri* demanded a devoted effort to incorporate the incredibly complex sets of historical and contemporary references that Piranesi disposed throughout the plates. Piranesi's return to the illustrations of imaginary prisons in the *Carceri d'Invenzione* (1761) more than ten years after the first publication is unequivocal evidence of Piranesi's commitment to its theoretical and philosophical content. If the *Carceri* was the purely aesthetic experimentation of forms or mere *capricci* that some authors had claimed, it would not have required such a dedicated revision. Piranesi never reworked the *Grotteschi*, for instance.

The theoretical debates that Piranesi addressed in the *Carceri* are the *raison d'être* of its very existence. The learned Piranesi, combining his extensive knowledge in the classical past and a sharp perception of his contemporary environment, conveyed in the mysterious forms of the imaginary prisons a world full of enquiries. Piranesi found the motivation to conceive the *Carceri* in the 1740s in his necessity of exploring concepts, expressing his opinions, and presenting arguments to the debates of his epoch. The intellectual maturity that he developed during the 1750s compelled him to go back to the etchings, to clarify its content, and to add new arguments.

In the chapter *On Monstrously Ambiguous Paintings*, James Elkin asserts that "monstrosity tends to concentrate most densely around pictures that are thought to have

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<sup>191</sup> The Introduction of the book *Piranesi's Lost Words* provides a good picture of Piranesi's eccentricities. See Minor, *Piranesi's Lost Words*.

<sup>192</sup> "Dark brain" is a famous expression that comes from the novelist Marguerite Yourcenar's book of essays. See Yourcenar, *The Dark Brain of Piranesi and Other Essays*.

been made intentionally ambiguous.”<sup>193</sup> This is the exact case of the *Carceri*. The etchings blur the boundaries that define a single meaning into a multiplicity of different associations. There are many more facets of this diamond waiting to shine. After all, the more facets a diamond receives, more light it reflects, and more beautiful it gets.

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<sup>193</sup> James Elkins, “On Monstrously Ambiguous Paintings,” in *Why Are Our Pictures Puzzles? On the Modern Origins of Pictorial Complexity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 99.

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APPENDIX A:  
PLATES OF *CARCERI D'INVENZIONE* (1761)



Figure A.1 Title Page





Figure A.2 Plate II (The Man in the Rack)



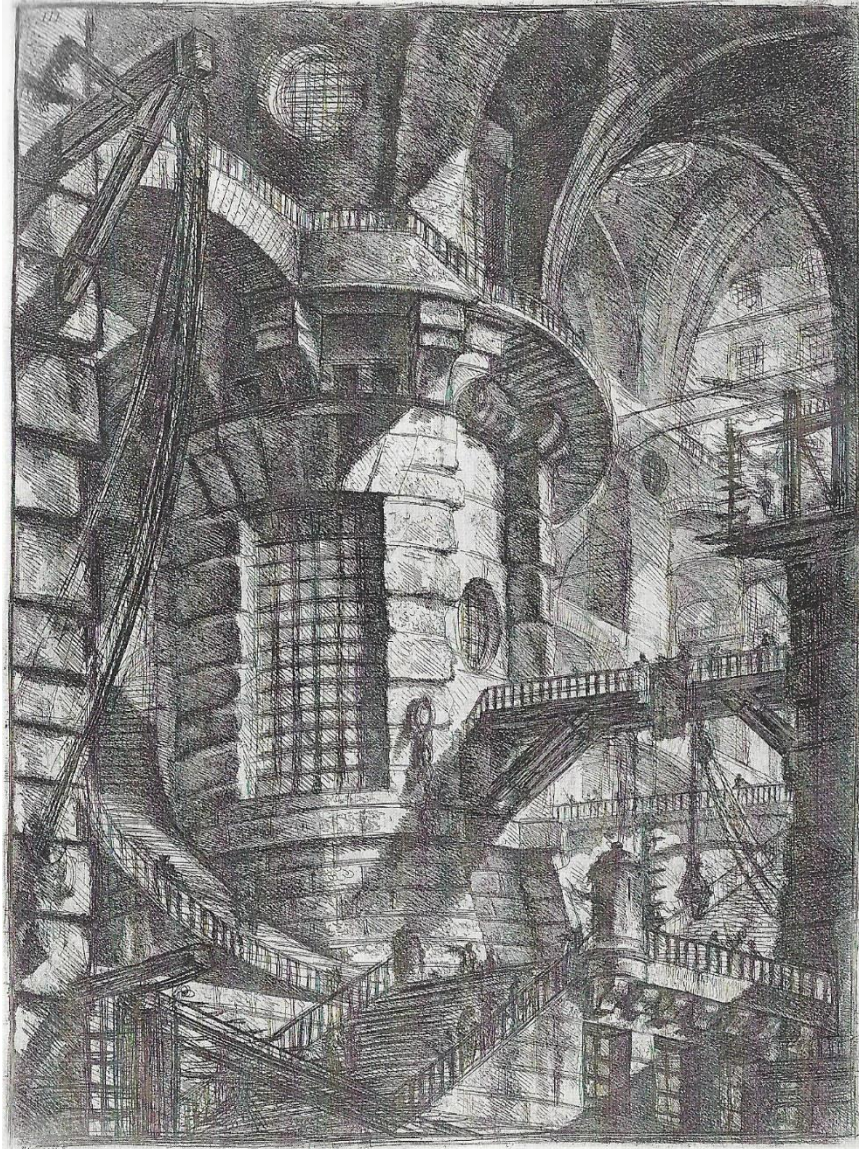


Figure A.3 Plate III (The Round Tower)



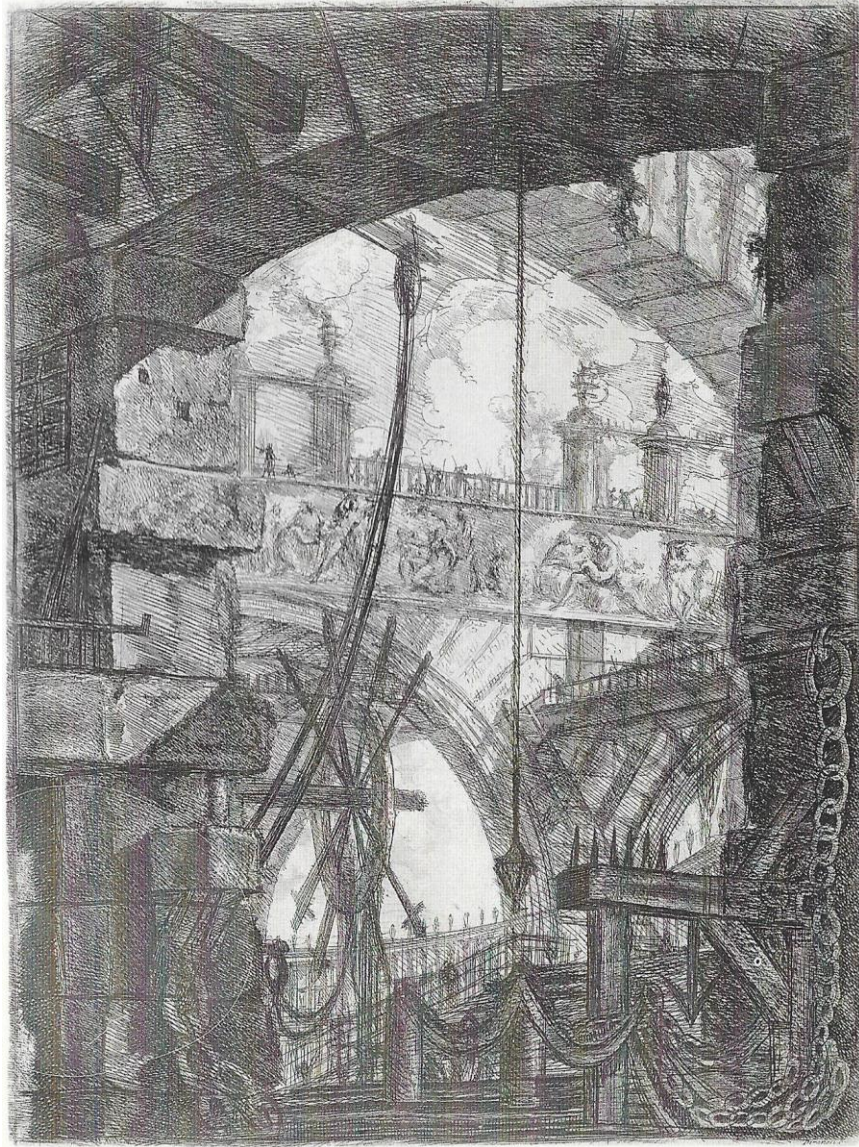


Figure A.4 Plate IV (The Grand Piazza)



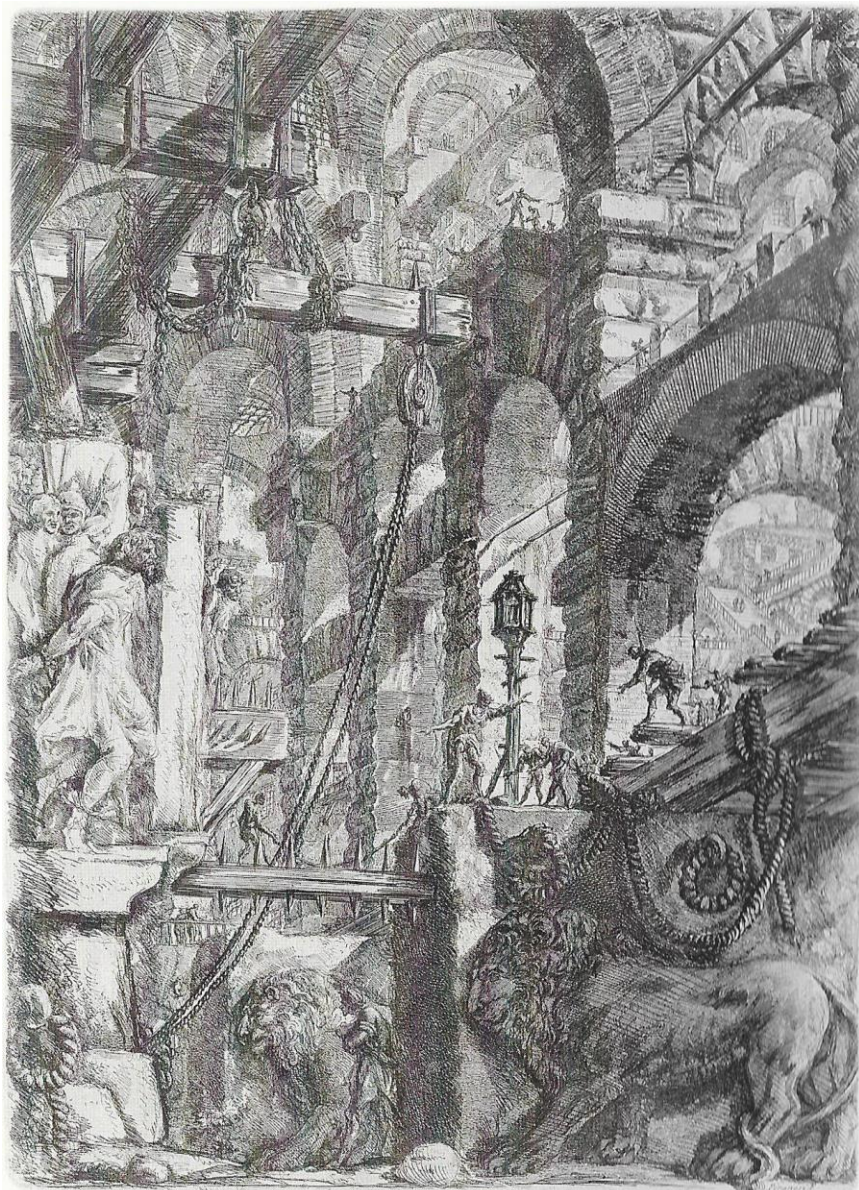


Figure A.5 Plate V (The Lion Bas-Reliefs)



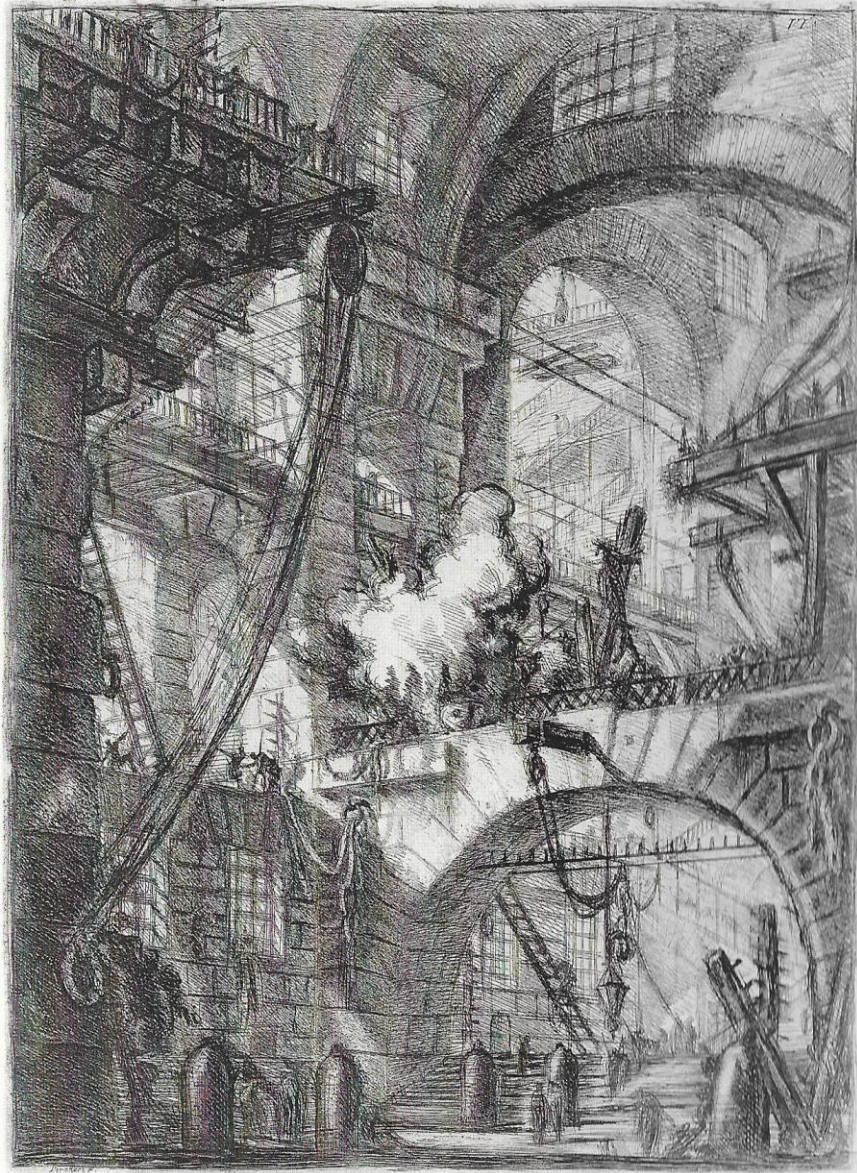


Figure A.6 Plate VI (The Smoking Fire)



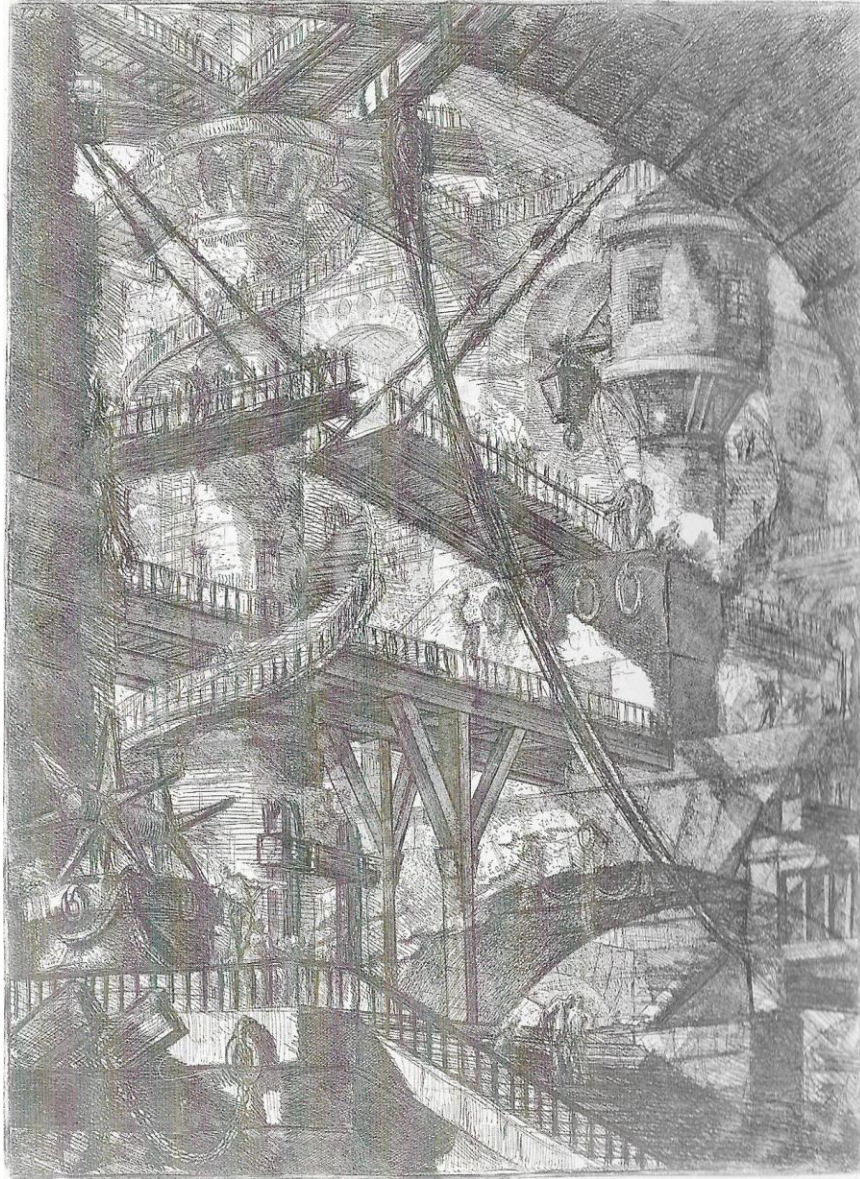


Figure A.7 Plate VII (The Drawbridge)



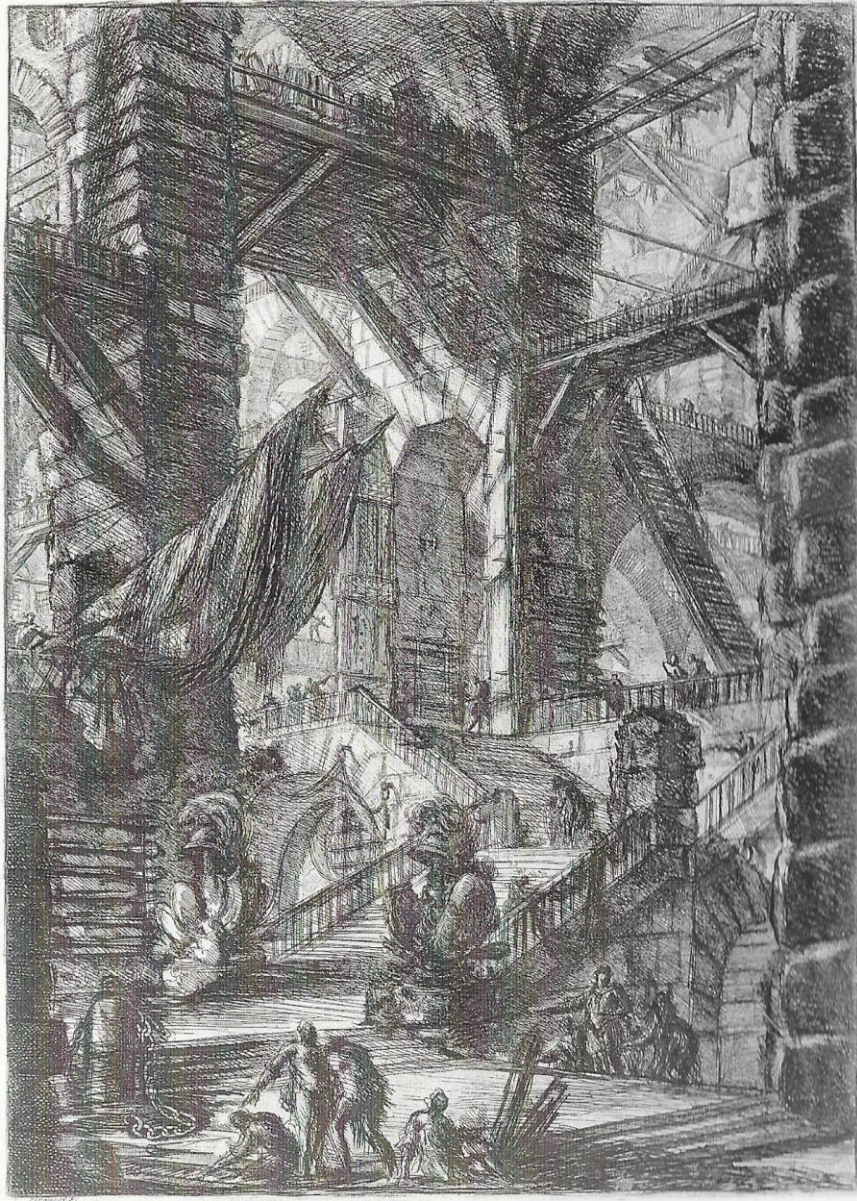


Figure A.8 Plate VIII (The Staircase with Trophies)



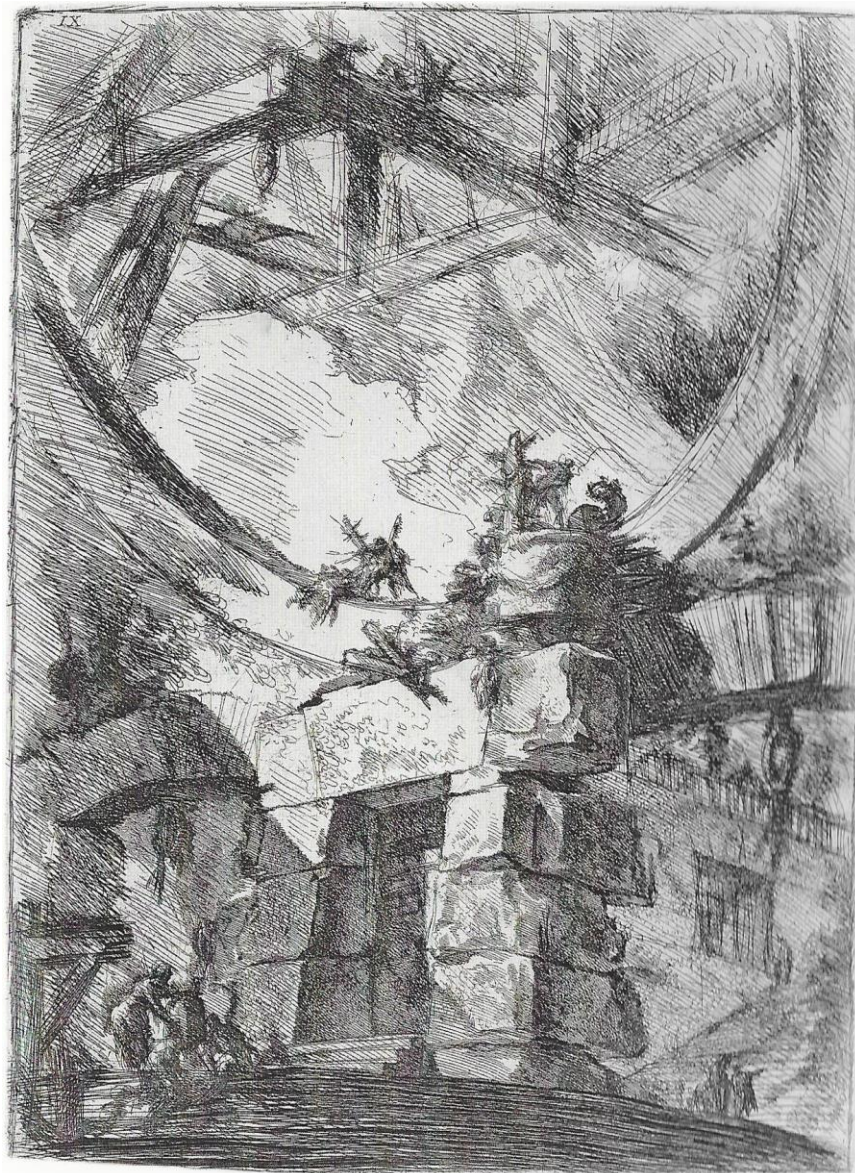


Figure A.9 Plate IX (The Giant Wheel)



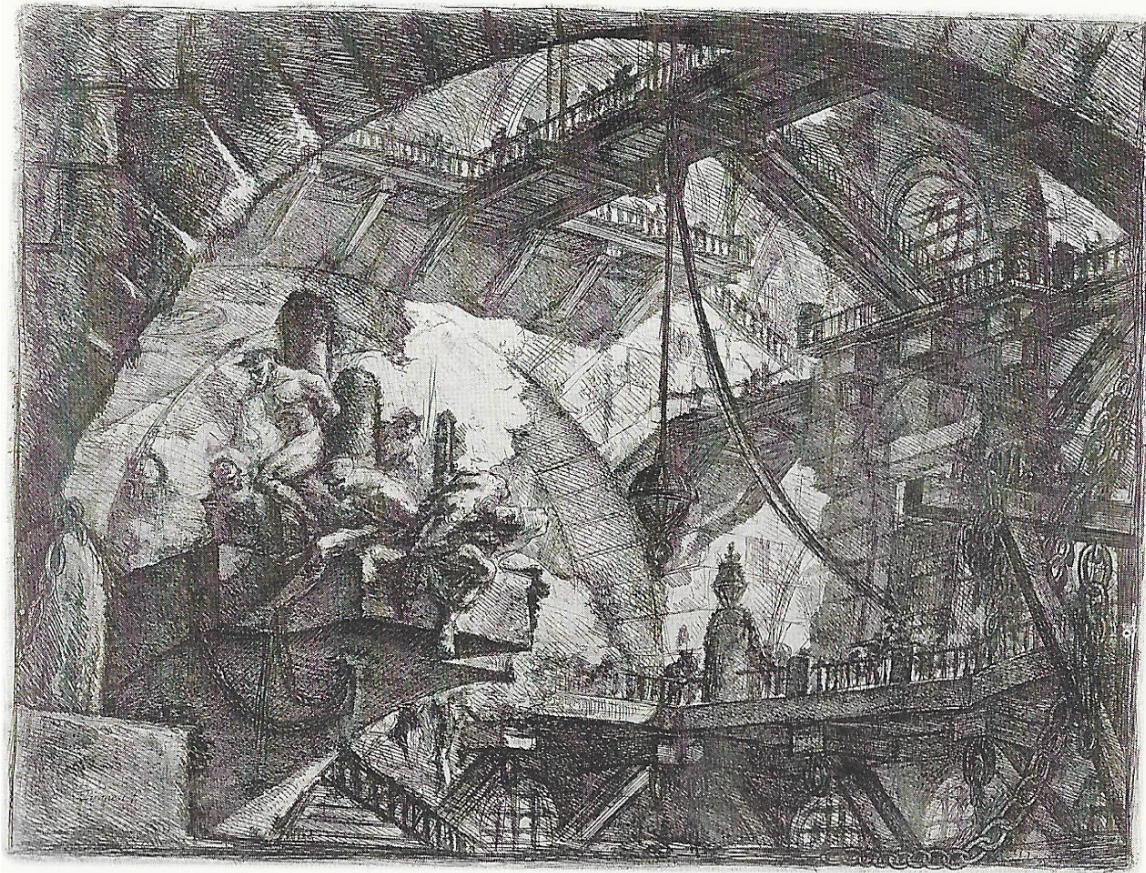


Figure A.10 Plate X (Prisoners on a Projecting Platform)



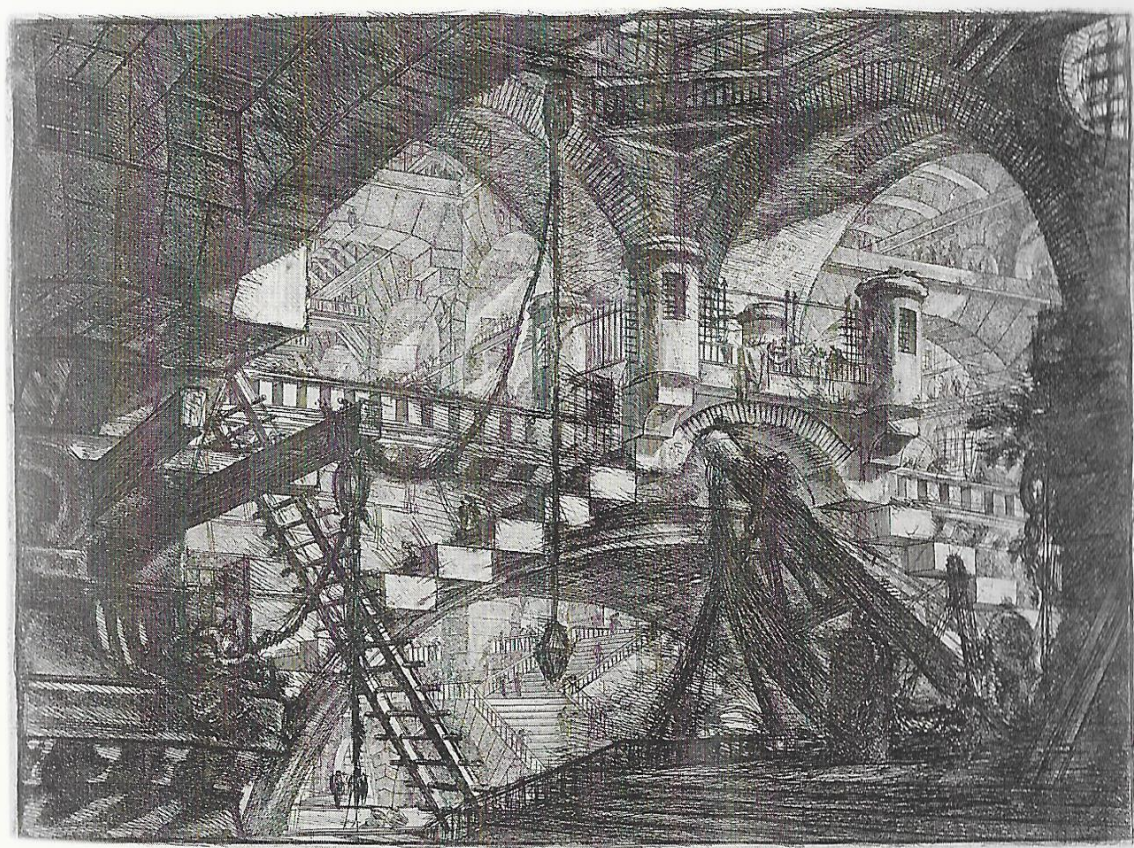


Figure A.11 Plate XI (The Arch with a Shell Ornament)



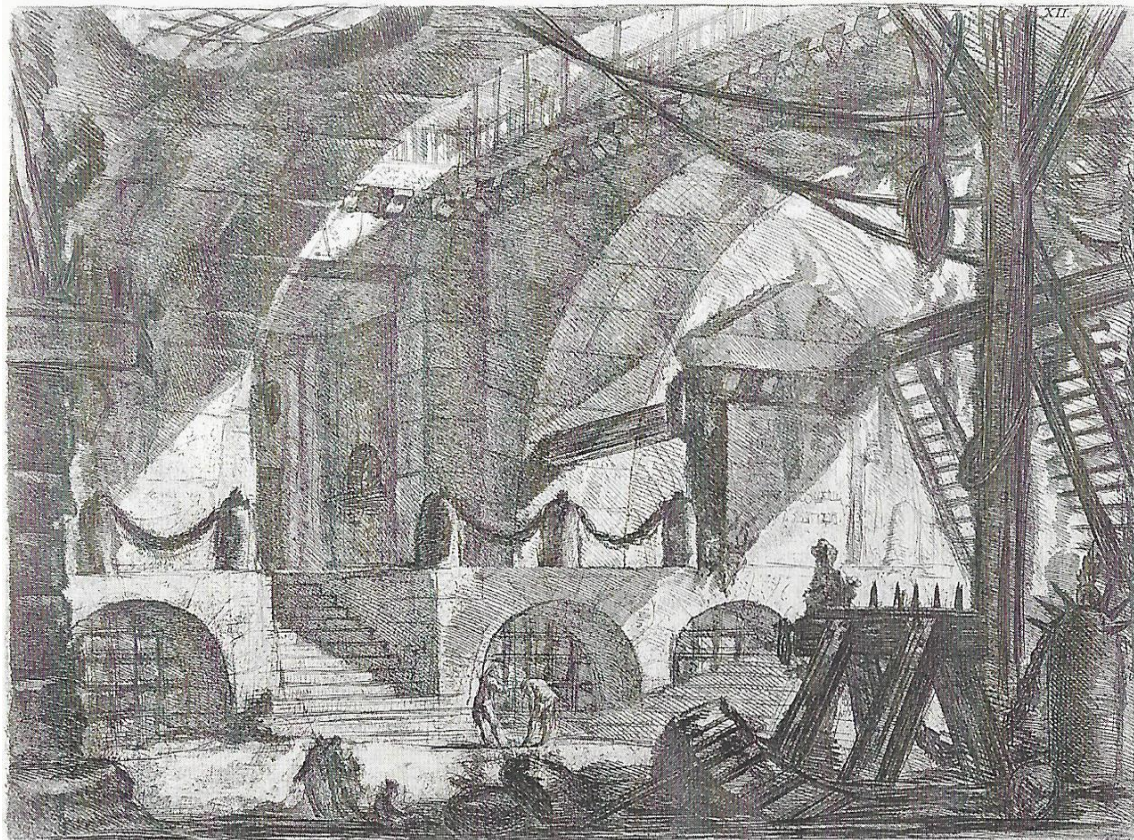


Figure A.12 Plate XII (The Sawhorse)



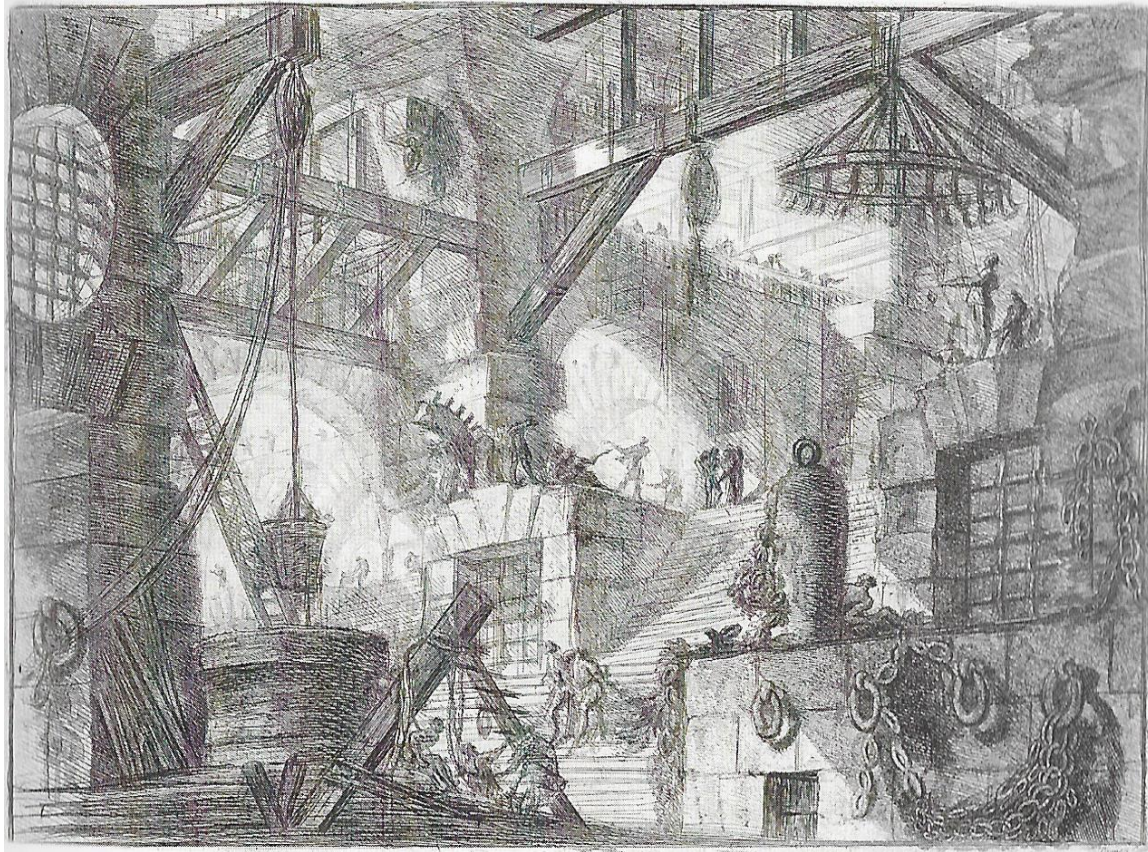


Figure A.13 Plate XIII (The Well)



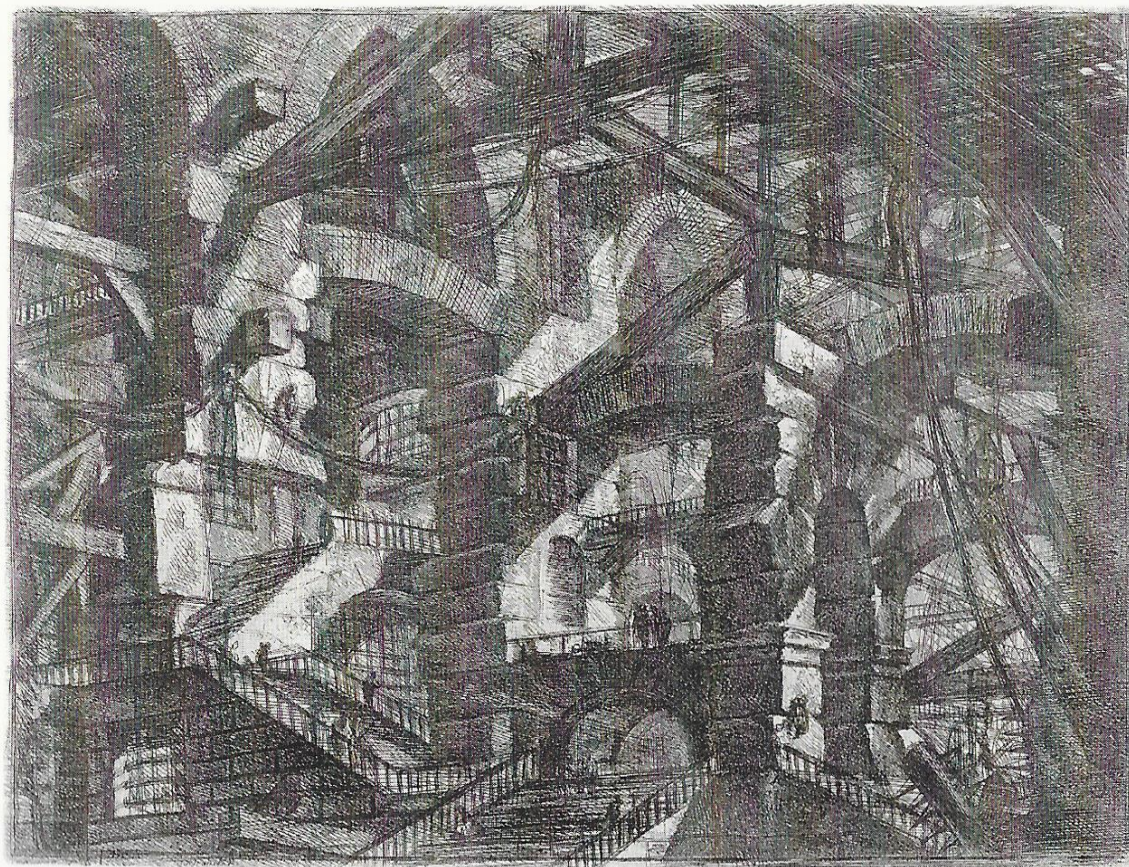


Figure A.14 Plate XIV (The Gothic Arch)



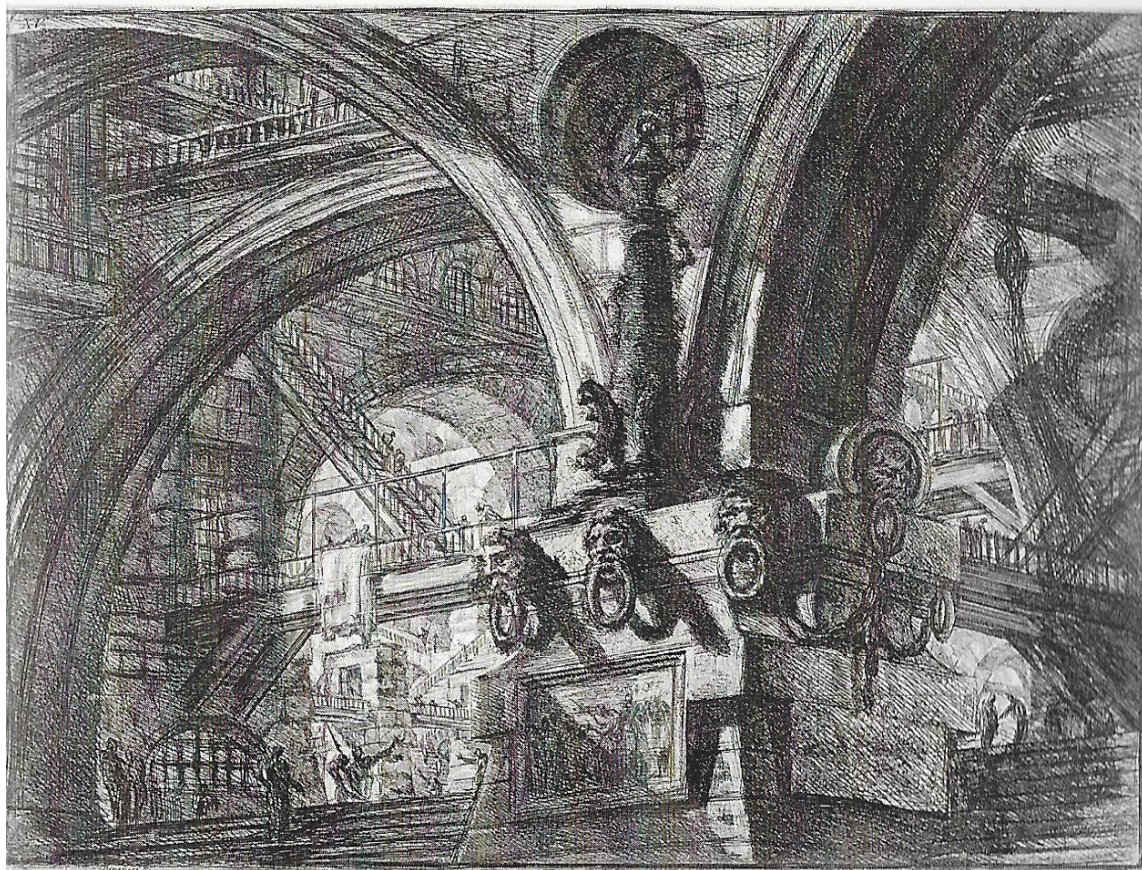


Figure A.15 Plate XV (The Pier with a Lamp)



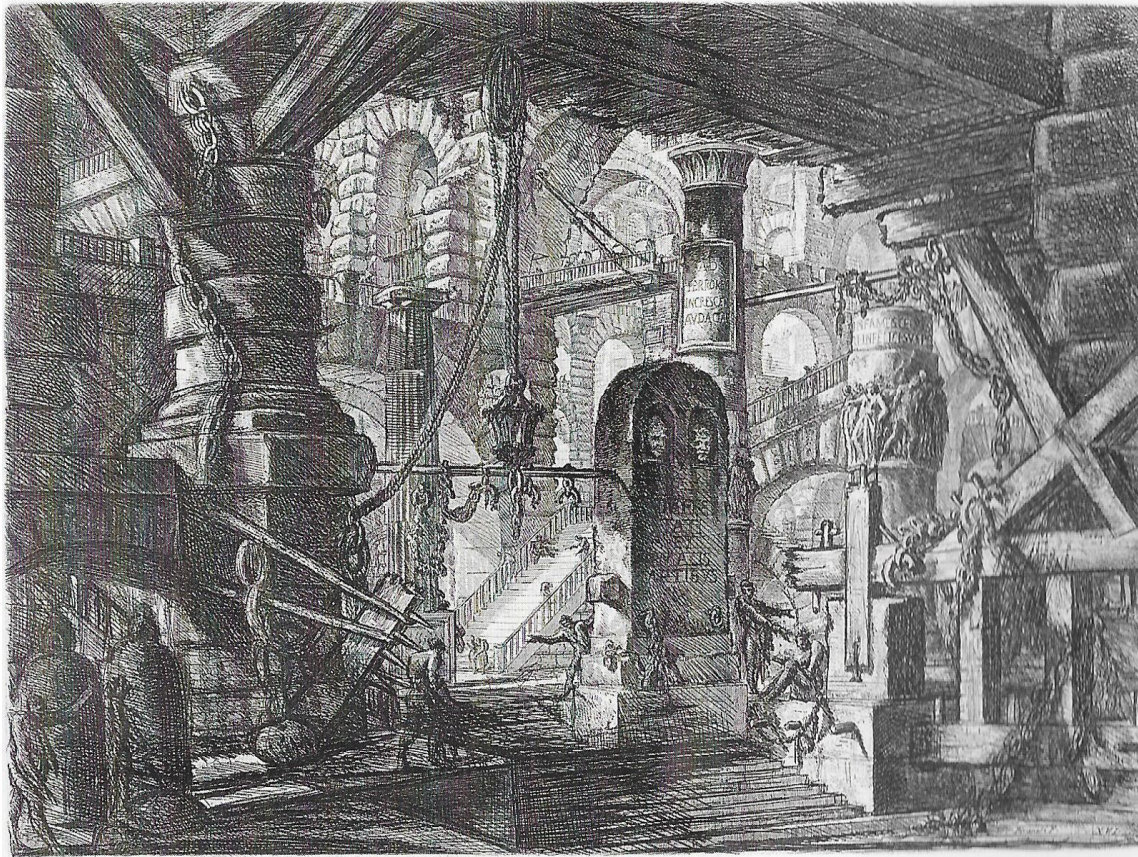


Figure A.16 Figure XVI (The Pier with Chains)



APPENDIX B:  
PLATES OF *INVENZIONI CAPRIC. DI CARCERI* (1749-50)



Figure B.1 Title Page (first edition)



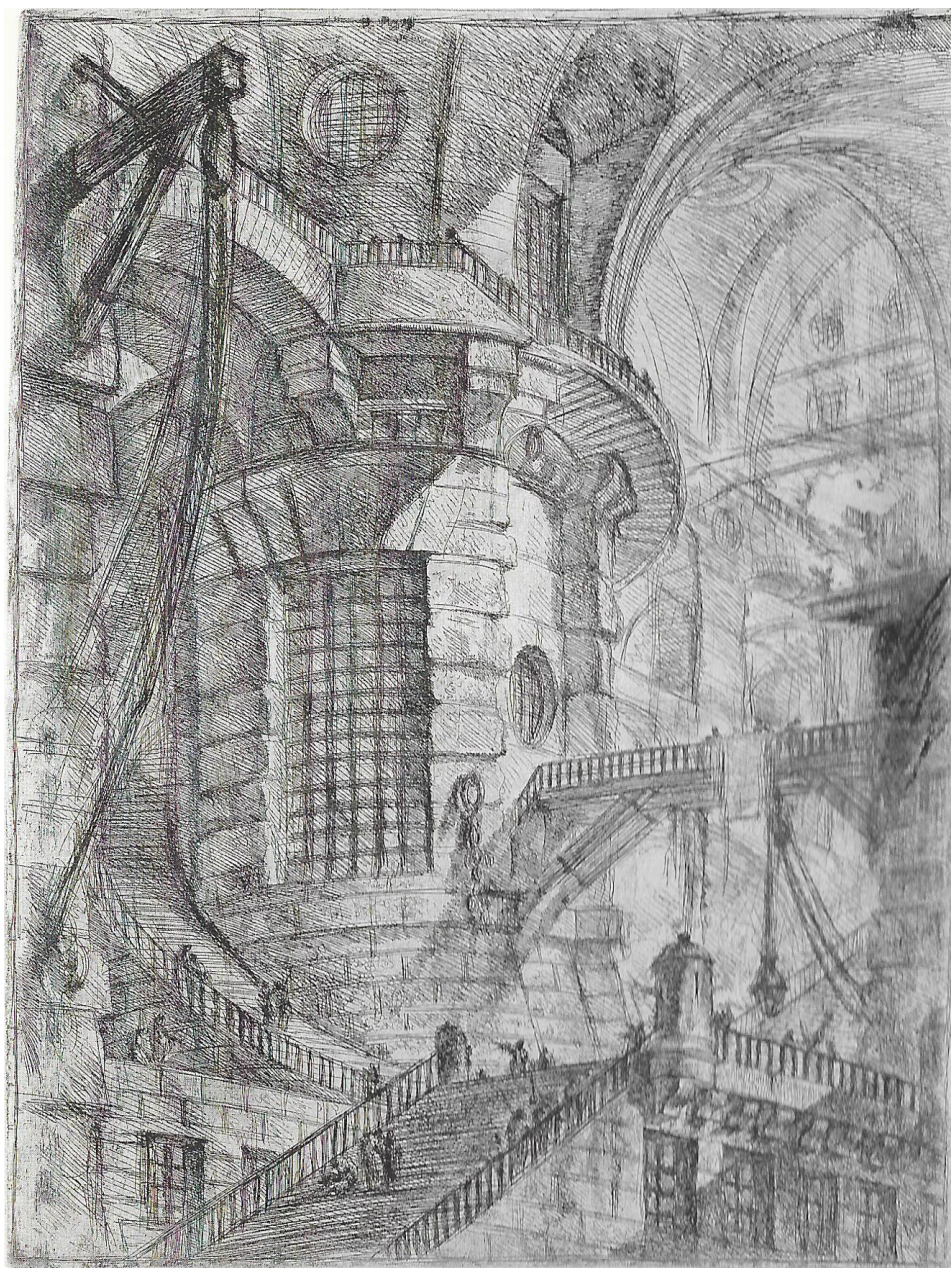


Figure B.2 Plate III (first edition)



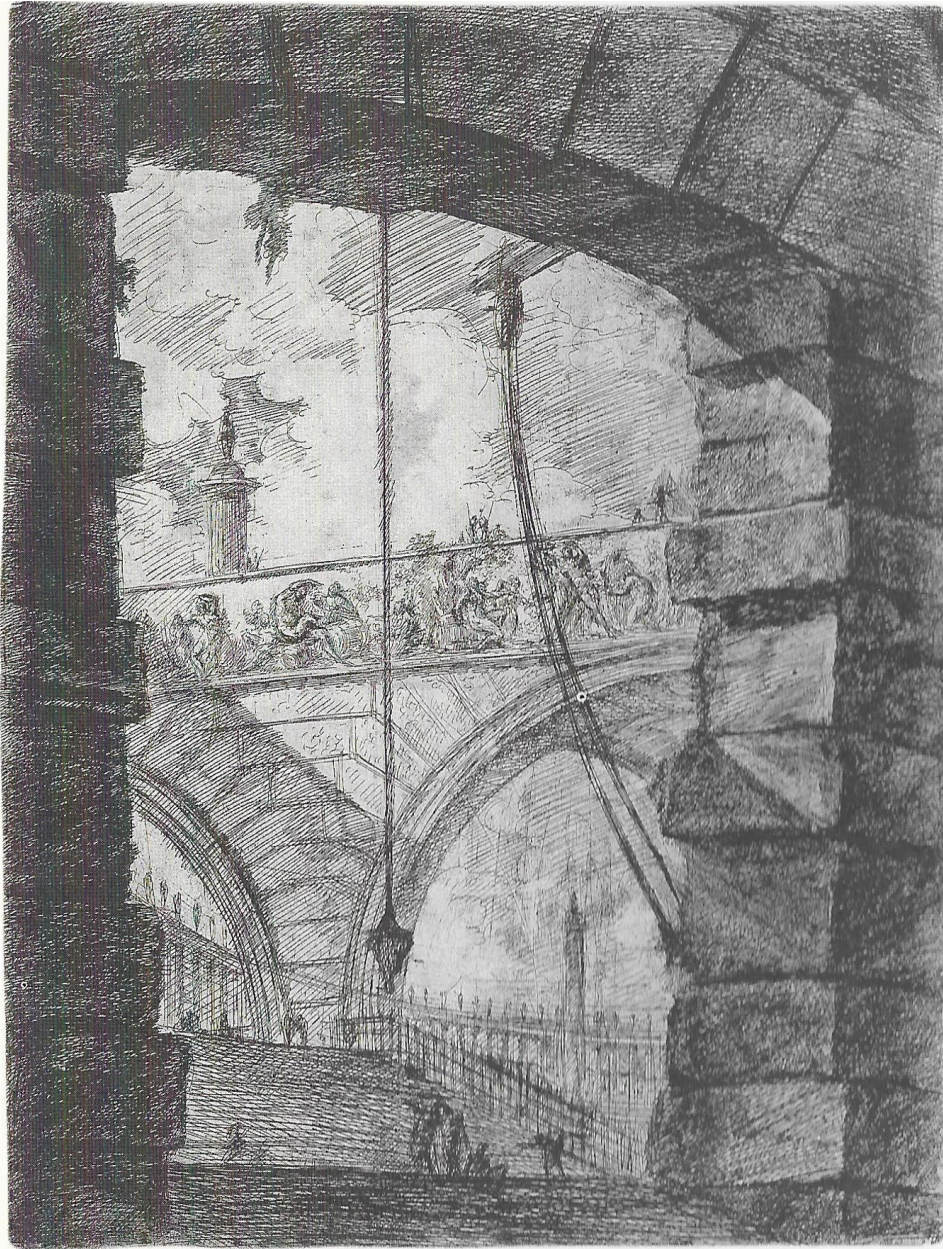


Figure B.3 Plate IV (first edition)





Figure B.4 Plate VI (first edition)





Figure B.5 Plate VII (first edition)





Figure B.6 Plate VIII (first edition)





Figure B.7 Plate IX (first edition)



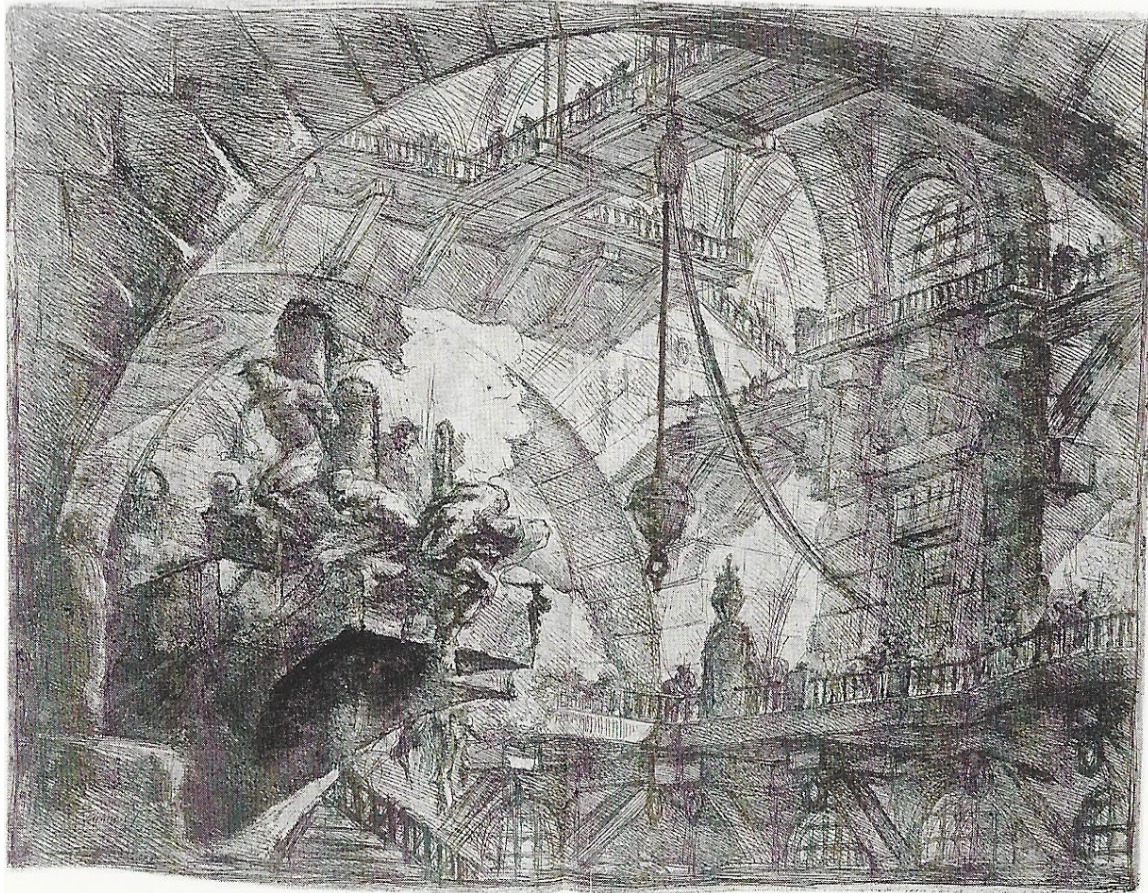


Figure B.8 Plate X (first edition)



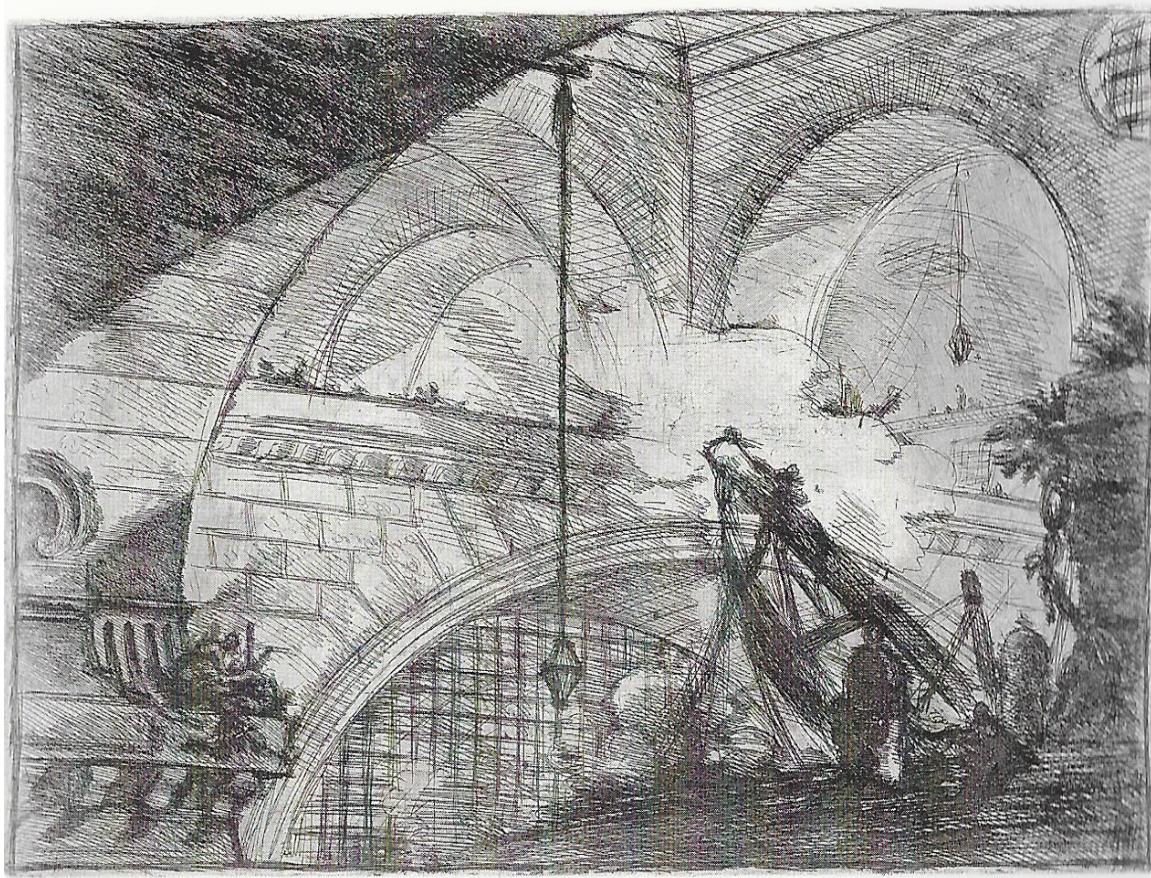


Figure B.9 Plate XI (first edition)



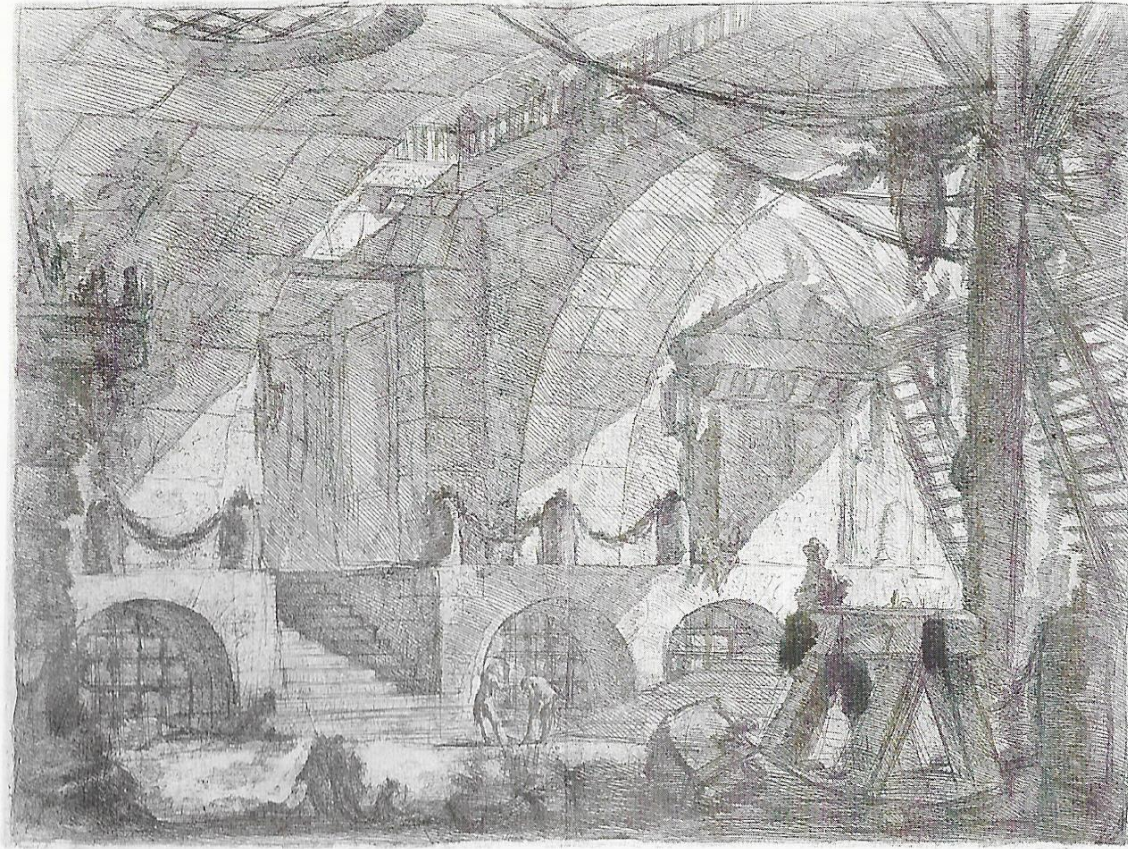


Figure B.10 Plate XII (first edition)



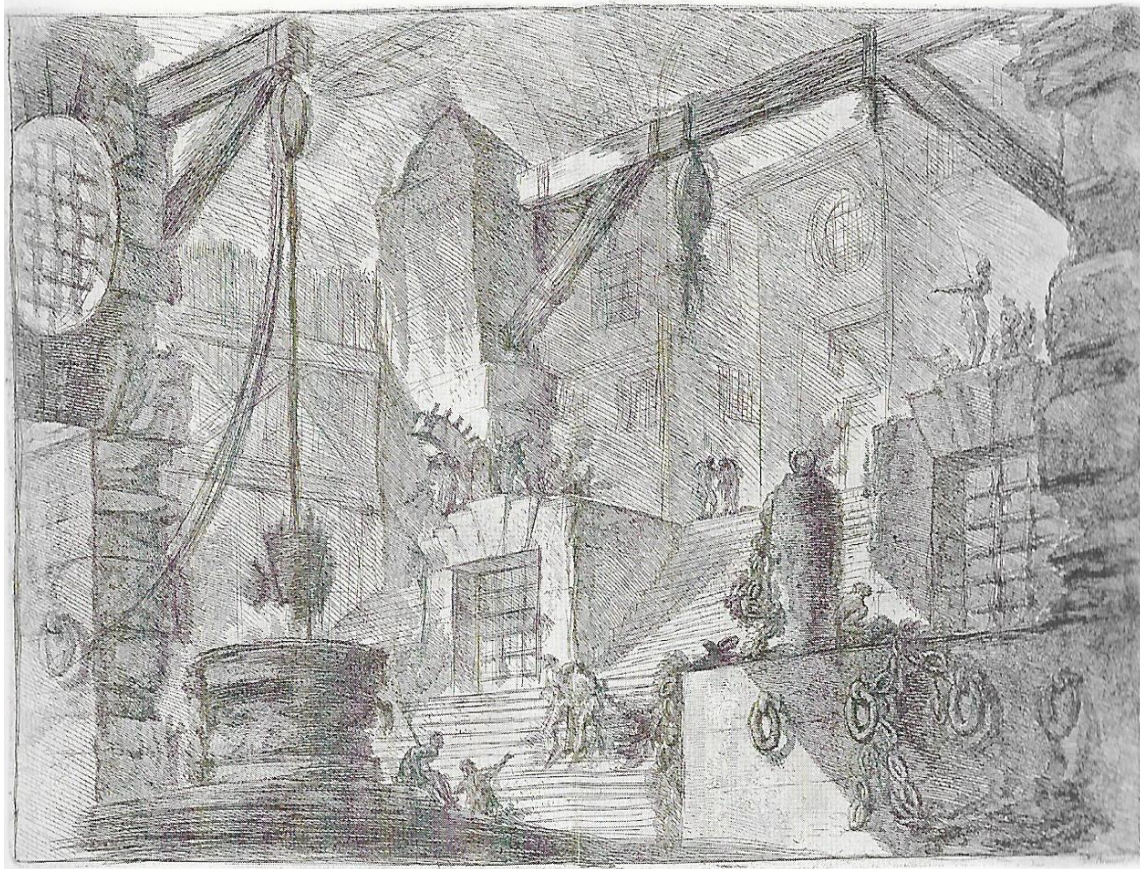


Figure B.11 Plate XIII (first edition)



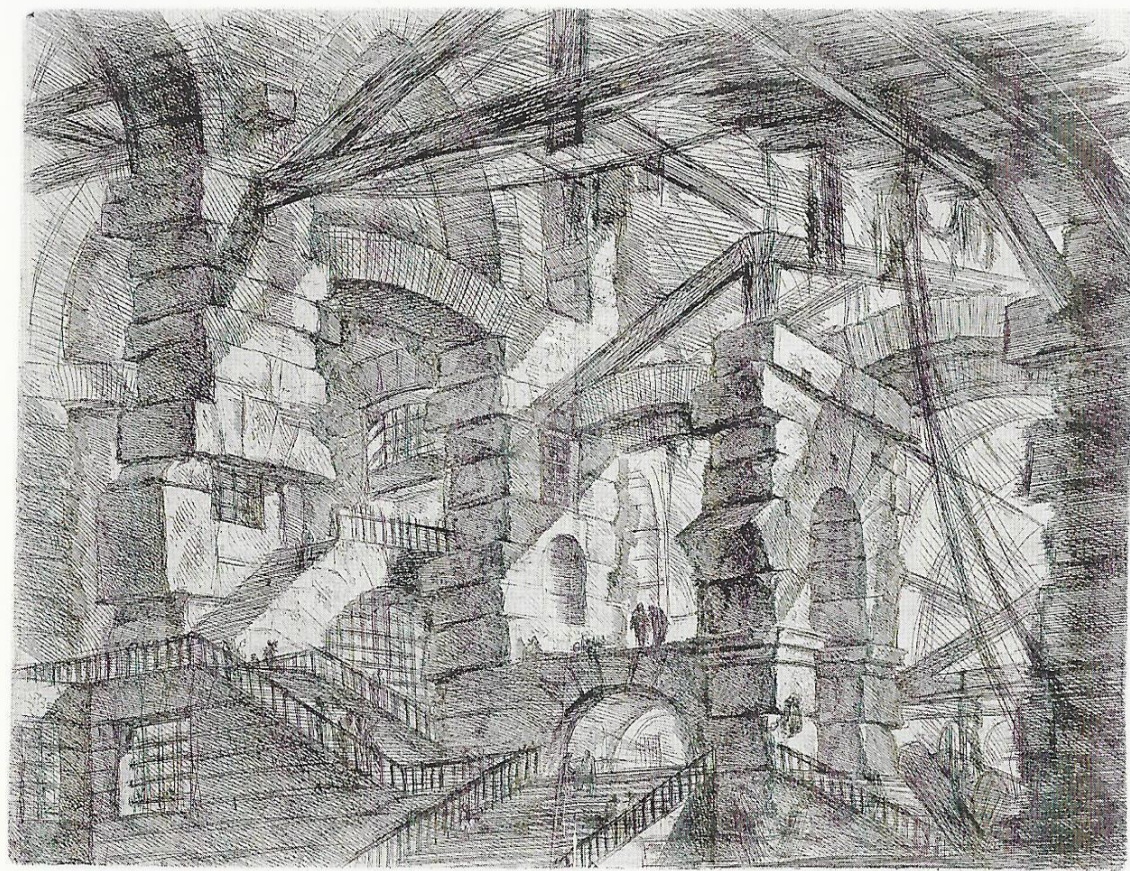


Figure B.12 Plate XIV (first edition)



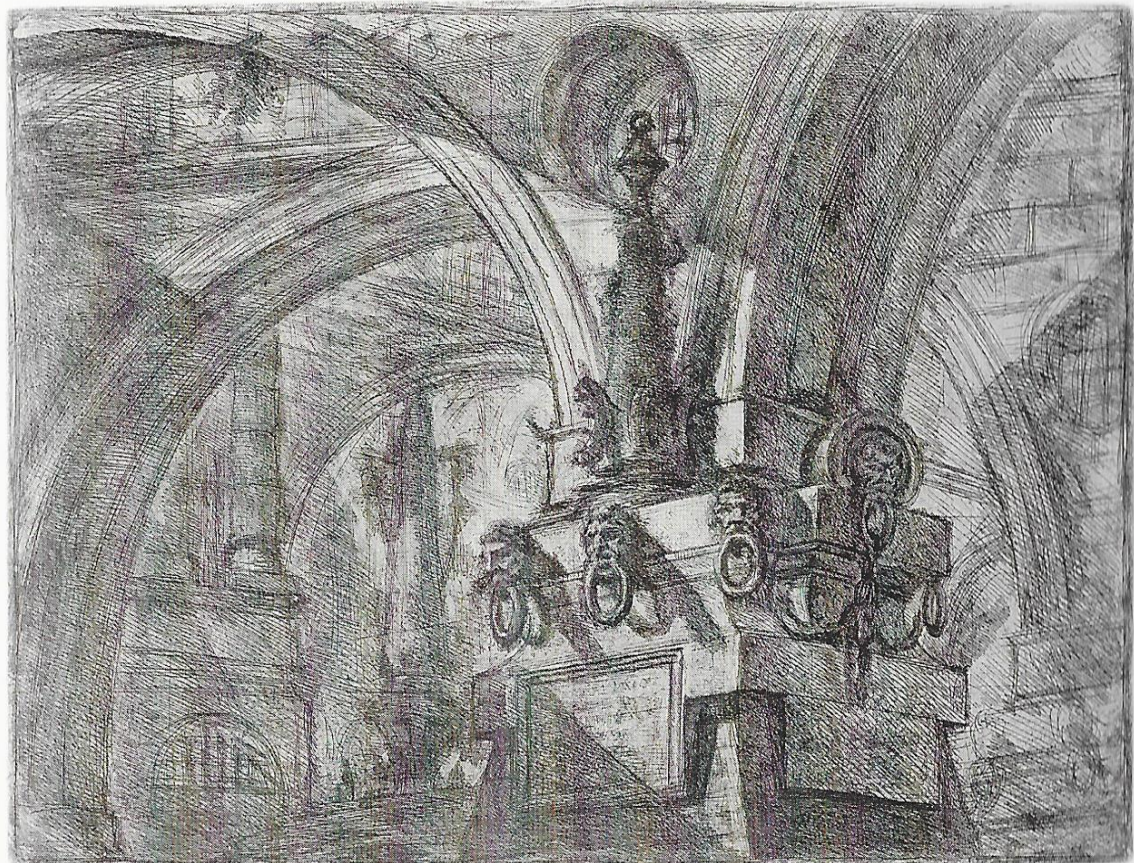


Figure B.13 Plate XV (first edition)



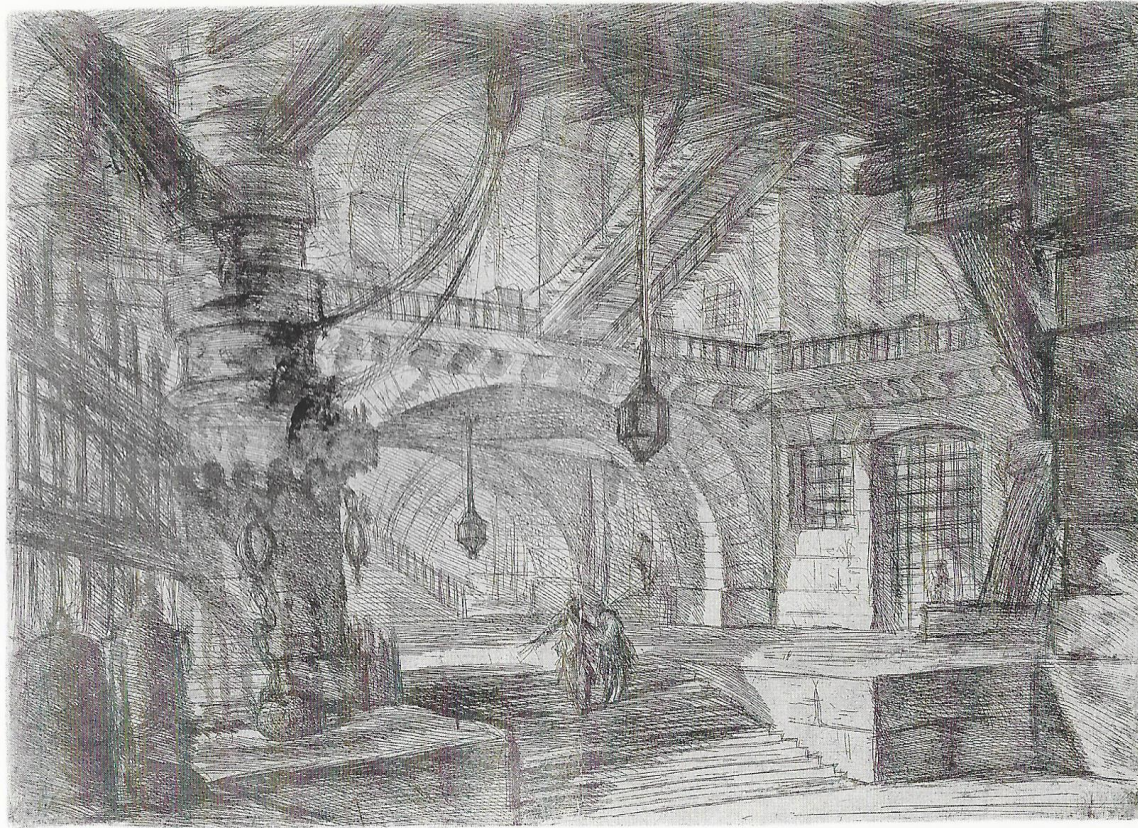


Figure B.14 Plate XVI (first edition)



## APPENDIX C: TABLES

Table C.1 Most recurrent Roman elements

plate	state	latin quotes	trophies	busts	reliefs	incised lettering	capstans	corvi	polypastos
<b>TP</b>	1st					x			
	2nd					x	x	x	
<b>II</b>	1st								
	2nd	x		x	x	x	?		
<b>III</b>	1st							x	?
	2nd							x	?
<b>IV</b>	1st				x				
	2nd				x		?	x	
<b>V</b>	1st								
	2nd			x	x				
<b>VI</b>	1st								
	2nd								
<b>VII</b>	1st					x		x	
	2nd								
<b>VIII</b>	1st		x						
	2nd		x						
<b>IX</b>	1st								
	2nd								x
<b>X</b>	1st							x	
	2nd							x	x
<b>XI</b>	1st								
	2nd							x	
<b>XII</b>	1st					x			x
	2nd					x			x
<b>XIII</b>	1st								
	2nd						x		x
<b>XIV</b>	1st								
	2nd								
<b>XV</b>	1st					x			
	2nd				x				
<b>XVI</b>	1st								
	2nd	x		x	x	x		x	

Table C.2 Most recurrent nautical elements

		Bridge (stone)	Gangpl./corvus	Pulleys	Ropes	Chains	Ship wheel	Beak/mast	Sails	Hull	Port deck/dock	Ladder	Watchtower	Bollard	Mooring ring	Mooring bitt	Mooring winch	Crane
TP	1 <sup>st</sup>	X			X	X									X	X		
	2 <sup>nd</sup>		X		X	X	X								X			X
II																		
		X		X	X						?				X		X	
III	1 <sup>st</sup>		X	X	X	X			X				X		X			X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>		X	X	X	X			X				X		X			X
IV	1 <sup>st</sup>	X		X	X													X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X	X	X	X	X	X							X	X			X
V																		
		X		X	X	X					X				X			X
VI	1 <sup>st</sup>	X		X	X								X		X			X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X	X	X	X			X				X	X	X	X			X
VII	1 <sup>st</sup>	X	X	X	X								X		X		X	X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X	X	X	X	X							X		X		X	X
VIII	1 <sup>st</sup>	X	X						X		X	X						
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X	X			X			X		X	X		X	X			
IX	1 <sup>st</sup>	?			X					X					X		?	
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	?			X					X					X		?	X
X	1 <sup>st</sup>	X	X	X	X	X		?			X		?	X	X			
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X	X	X	X	X		?			X		?	X	X			X
XI	1 <sup>st</sup>	X			X	X		X	X	X				X	X			
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X			
XII	1 <sup>st</sup>	X		X	X	X			?			X		X				
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X		X	X	X			?			X		X				
XIII	1 <sup>st</sup>			X	X	X		?			?			X	X			X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X		X	X	X	X				?	X		X	X	?		X
XIV	1 <sup>st</sup>	X		X	X			?							X			
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X	X	X	X										X			X
XV	1 <sup>st</sup>	X				X									X			
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X	X	X	X	X			X			X			X			
XVI	1 <sup>st</sup>	X		X	X	X					X	X		X	X			X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	X	X	X	X	X					X			X	X			X

Table C.3 Most recurrent torture devices

plate	state	<i>corda</i>	<i>veglia</i>	spikes	Pulleys + ropes	chains	iron maiden	rings
<b>TP</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>					X		X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>			X		X		X
<b>II</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>	X		X	X	X		X
<b>III</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>				X	X		X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>			X	X	X		X
<b>IV</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>				X			
	2 <sup>nd</sup>			X	X	X	X	
<b>V</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>			X	X	X		X
<b>VI</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>			X	X			X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>			X	X	X	X	X
<b>VII</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>			X	X			X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>			X	X	X		X
<b>VIII</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>							
	2 <sup>nd</sup>					X	X	X
<b>IX</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>							X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>							X
<b>X</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>		X		X		X	X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>		X		X	X	X	X
<b>XI</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>					X	X	X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>				X	X	X	X
<b>XII</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>				X			
	2 <sup>nd</sup>			X	X	X	X	
<b>XIII</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>			X	X	X	X	X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>			X	X	X	X	X
<b>XIV</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>				X			
	2 <sup>nd</sup>			X	X			
<b>XV</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>					X		X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>				X	X		X
<b>XVI</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>				X	X	X	X
	2 <sup>nd</sup>			X	X	X	X	X